

THE UNTAMED OUTSIDE:  
IMAGINATION AND PRACTICE OF AGRARIAN COMMUNE IN PEOPLE'S  
REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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This dissertation examines the historical practices and literary representations of “agrarian commune” from 1949 to the contemporary time in People’s Republic of China, focusing on its ambiguous role in the heterogeneous formation of Chinese modernity. Current Chinese literary studies have not explored the literary imagination of “agrarian commune” and its relation to modernity. Combining the Marxist political-economic analysis of China’s socio-economic reality with the textual analysis of literary works, this study seeks to explore how this “non-capitalist” formation of “commune” articulates with the “capitalist sector” in the uneven structure of China’s national economy in a complex way: on the one hand, it creates an “internal border” within China and serves for the internal primitive accumulation for the state; on the other hand, it produces the resisting elements that continually contest and disrupt the logic of capitalism, and opens the possibility for alternative practice of the “common life” that transcends the logic of capital and state. This study unpacks the complexity of “commune” in different periods through the reading of literary works. Chapter One focuses on the “collectivization movement” in socialist period and explores Zhao Shuli and Liu Qing’s divergent conceptions about the “agricultural cooperative” in relation to the state. Chapter Two focuses on the “underclass literature” that captures

the living conditions of rural migrants under the “household contract responsibility system” in the era of market economy and global capitalism. Chapter Three examines the recent effort of reviving the “commune” and “common life” in the “New Co-operative Movement” promoted by New Left intellectuals after the year 2000, focusing on Wang Anyi and Liu Jiming’s novels. By looking into the different ways that the collective land ownership interacts with capital and the state throughout different stages of modern China, this study shows how the rural “outside” plays both a “productive” and a “subversive” role in the global uneven structure of capitalism, thereby enriching the discussion of “uneven development” in Marxist scholarship, and filling a blank spot in current Chinese literary studies regarding the rural modernity.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Xiangjing Chen was born in Nanning, China. She received her B.A. and M.A. in Chinese Modern Literature from Peking University in 2007 and 2010, and entered the PhD program of Asian Literature, Religion, and Culture at Cornell University in 2011. While her research field is Chinese literature, her research interest covers various theoretical and historical topics across disciplines, including modernity of East Asia, Chinese socialist culture, Marxism, and translation theory. She passed her defense in June 2017, and will start working as a post-doctoral fellow at the Institute of World Literatures and Cultures at Tsinghua University, China in the fall of 2017.

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## INTRODUCTION

### WHAT IS COMMUNE

#### ***Marx and the Ambiguous “Commune”***

“Commune” is a controversial term in Marxist discourse, denoting multiple meanings and indicating a complex turn of Marx’s thought. A systematic articulation seems to be necessary to capture the difficulty and hesitation of Marx in contemplating the highly theoretically charged and extremely ambiguous “commune” in Marx’s thoughts. Generally speaking, we can hastily say that in some places, as in “The British Rule in India” (1853), “commune” denotes an archaic form of social formation as pre-capitalist mode of production, which is regarded as prior to the rise of capitalism and could be developed into the capitalist mode of production. However, in other places, such as *Grundrisse*, although “commune” is still regarded as an archaic one, it is designated as a mode of production outside the “history”, that it is intimately linked with the stigmatized term of “oriental despotism” as well as the “Asiatic Mode of Production” which generated controversial debates in later socialist states. But, thirdly, there is a positive way of understanding “commune,” when Marx in his later years discussed Russian Commune or “Paris Commune,” it is imagined to as the base of “communism” that could overcome the capitalism, and is consciously linked to the struggle of Paris Commune and therefore linked to the imagination of an alternative future or another temporality.

This demands us to pay more attention to particular junction of these three paths. That is the point in *Grundrisse*, where Marx denotes various kinds of precapitalist

social formations that are characterized by the incomplete development of private property and individual in modern sense. The three major types of “commune” – clan (to which Asiatic mode of production belongs), Greco-Roman, Germanic – all share the characteristics that the laboring individual’s “relation to the objective conditions of labor is mediated through his presence as member of the commune.”<sup>1</sup> Of the three type of commune, the clan is the earliest, initial type, and has the least degree of individuation, in which individuals are “mere accidents,” as “purely natural component parts,”<sup>2</sup> and to this the least individuated “clan” type belongs the Asiatic commune, with its own distinct character. On the other hand, the Roman state/commune had a more alienated relation of individual to the commune (state), in which individuals can be private proprietors of land as a member of the commune/state; and the Germanic commune had a even more loose form, existing “only in the periodic gathering-together of the commune members,” appearing “as a *coming-together*, not as a *being-together*; as a unification made up of independent subjects, landed proprietors, and not as a unity.”<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, here Marx only elaborates on the ancient mode of production which is located at the first or second stage of the linearly history of historical materialism, as Marx clearly claimed in his *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economics* (1859)<sup>4</sup>. However, a closer look at this draft of thoughts shows the

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 486.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 474

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 483.

<sup>4</sup> Marx said, “In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of the production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society.” Here Marx incorporates Asiatic Mode of Production a one stage of the unilinear scheme of “progress.” See Marx, “Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,” in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works*, vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 504.

uncertainty and hesitation of Marx in pondering the “oriental commune.” Indeed, of all the communes, the oriental commune (the Asiatic type) stands out as a unique type, distinguished from all other communes for its highest degree of communalism and the least degree of individuation. First, it is the least individuated. “In the specifically oriental form (wherever property exists *only* as communal property, ... the individual member is as such as only *possessor* of a particular part, hereditary or not, since any fraction of the property belongs to no member for himself, but to him only as immediate member of the commune, i.e. as in direct unity with it, not in distinction to it. This individual is thus only a possessor. What exists is only communal *property*, and only *private possession*.”<sup>5</sup>

Here Marx implies, communal property is a kind of private possession and the individual is also a possessor in an indirect method of possession. This is the first level of the structure of the Asiatic type. The second level is there is a “despot.” Indeed, Asiatic form is distinguished by the “unity” of all communes embodied in a despot:

It is not in the least a contradiction to it that, as in most of the Asiatic land forms, the comprehensive unity standing above all these little communities appears as the higher proprietor or as the sole proprietor; the real communities hence only as hereditary possessors. Because the unity is the real proprietor and the real presupposition of communal property, it follows that this unity can appear as a particular entity above the many real particular communities, where the individual is then in fact propertyless, or, property – i.e. the relation of the individual to the natural conditions of labor and of reproduction as belonging to him, as the objective, nature-given inorganic body of his subjectivity - appears mediated for him through a cession by the total unity – a unity realized in the form of the despot, the father of the many communities – to the individual, through the mediation of a particular commune. The surplus product – which is, incidentally, determined by law in consequence of the real appropriation through labor – thereby automatically belongs to this highest unity. Amidst oriental despotism and the propertyless which seems legally to

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<sup>5</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 477

exist there, this clan or communal property exists in fact as the foundation, created mostly by a combination of manufactures and agriculture within the small commune, which thus becomes altogether self-sustaining, and contains all the conditions of reproduction and surplus reproduction within itself.<sup>6</sup>

Here we can see two characteristics of Asiatic commune, or “oriental despotism.” First, its structure is characterized by the unity embodied by a despot that sits above numerous mutually isolated village communes, to which communes submit their surplus product or common labor. The unity of communes embodied in a despotic regime above them is the presupposition of the existence of the communes – “the communal conditions of real appropriation through labor, aqueducts, very important among the Asiatic peoples; means of communication, etc. then appear as the work of the higher unity – of the despotic regime hovering above the little communes.”<sup>7</sup> The second feature is the self-sustaining mode of existence based on the union of agriculture and manufacture. The “union between agricultural and manufacturing industry” constitutes the “economic basis” of their “self-supporting” mode of existence. According to Marx, the combination of these two characteristics has endowed the Asiatic type with the long-lasting vitality, making the AMP an irreducible other of History. Marx points out, “The Asiatic form necessarily hangs on most tenaciously and for the longest time. This is due to its presupposition that the individual does not become independent vis-à-vis the commune; that there is a self-sustaining circle of production, unity of agriculture and manufactures, etc.”<sup>8</sup> Kevin B. Anderson, in his groundbreaking book *Marx at Margins*, analyzes, “Of all of the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 472-473

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 473-474

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 486

precapitalist forms, the Asian one was structurally at the furthest remove from modern capitalism, to which it put up a strong resistance. ... Whereas the evolution the Greco-Roman and Germanic forms saw the breakdown of communal society, as well as a certain degree of individuation in both consciousness and social existence, including property forms, Asian societies preserved more of the older clan-based communal forms.”<sup>9</sup>

For Anderson, such tenacity of Asiatic commune met with two different attitudes from Marx as he went through the intellectual turn from a unilinear view of history to a more multilinear view. He shows, up until 1853, Marx was still trapped in a unilinear view of history, focused primarily on working class struggle within Western Europe and North America, and barely paid attention to non-Western society. At that time, when he just began to approach this unique form of oriental society, he conceived it as a historically backward social formation that needed to be broken and overcome by more advanced civilization for the sake of historical progress. As is shown in his comments on the Indian “village community” in 1853:

We must not forget that these idyllic village-communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all. We must not forget that this undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence evoked on the other part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction and

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<sup>9</sup> Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 159.

rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindostan. We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Kanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow.<sup>10</sup>

Anderson points out, Marx's notion of oriental society in this period was strongly informed by Hegelian notion of teleological progression and Eurocentrism; and this has been criticized by many people, including Edward Said. Another historian, Perry Anderson, also criticizes that Marx have unreflectively received the Enlightenment discourse's biased description of "oriental society" as "despotism." This discursive tradition of "despotism," extrojected onto the "Orient" since the antiquity, consisted of a series of Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu, Adam Smith, Hegel, the travel writings of Francois Bernier and Richard Jones, and informed the German classical philosophy and British political economy which Marx heavily drew on as his intellectual resources. In Perry Anderson's view, Marx has basically reproduced the Eurocentric prejudice of "oriental despotism" in Enlightenment thoughts without much alteration. For example, Marx's view on India as of 1853 "were very close to the main themes of traditional European commentary on Asian history and society, in both direction and tone," especially in his "repeated assertion of the stagnation and immutability of the Oriental world."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, "The British Rule in India," in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 12 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 132.

<sup>11</sup> Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: N.L.B, 1974), 470.

But perhaps Perry Anderson should limit this critique of Marx to the 1853 notes of Marx, which was indeed infused with the Eurocentric bias. The materials that Marx cited for his description of India came from the official report of the British House of Commons in Indian affairs, which employed words like “unchanged” and “from time immemorial” - “the village ... care not to what power it is transferred, or to what sovereign it devolves; its internal economy remains unchanged.”<sup>12</sup> As we can see, “stagnation” is considered to be the defining feature of “oriental society.” And it is obvious that Marx held a negative view towards the “stationary” character of oriental society, describing it as “undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life” and “passive sort of existence” which needs to be broken for the sake of progress. Hence, though British colonists’ invasion of India has brought tremendous misery to the people there, Marx believed it was the inevitable price that needed to be paid for the overall progress of human beings - “The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, as many scholars have noted, Marx held an unilinear view of history when he was writing this article in 1853, thinking that it is the law of history that capitalism should conquer all the backward pre-capitalist societies and replicate its mirror image on the rest of the earth.

However, the Eurocentric bias of “oriental despotism” should not be taken as the entirety of Marx’s view on “commune.” Kevin Anderson argues, starting from 1853, Marx gradually turned toward a more multi-linear view of historical development and

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<sup>12</sup> Marx, “The British Rule in India,” 131

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 132



started to show more interest in non-Western society. In his detailed and solid study of Marx's late writings on non-Western and precapitalist societies, Anderson notices several important changes in Marx's attitude toward non-Western societies. First, different from his earlier modernist attitude that praised capitalist modernization and historical progression, Marx showed more aversion to capitalism and colonialism's repressive and violent character, and denounced them as "barbarism." And instead of affirming the "historical inevitability" of their conquest of India like he used to do, Marx emphasized the contingent character of the Muslim and British conquest.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Marx showed a more favorable attitude towards the lengthy resistance of Indian people, stressing their perseverance rather than their eventual defeat. On the other hand, Marx stopped treating non-Western society as "unchanging" and "stagnate," but started to recognize the internal historical development within the oriental society, and considered that oriental society to be able to develop on its own even without the intervention of external forces of colonialism. These non-Western societies served as lens for Marx through which the capitalism of Western Europe was "particularized" or "provincialized", instead of being a universal stage that all societies must go through.

The great contribution of Anderson's *Marx at Margins* is to liberate these traditionally invisible, fragmentary observations by Marx and to rescue Marx from the economic determinism, Hegelian linear history and Eurocentrism. And it also liberates AMP for a more open understanding. In this context of Marx's changing attitude, the persisting existence of "Asiatic Mode of Production" over a long period of time started

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<sup>14</sup> Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 214.

to acquire more positive meaning. While the “oriental despotism” used to be viewed negatively as the “stagnation” that deters it from “progress,” now the difficulty of Asiatic society’s subsumption by the capitalist development was viewed in a favorable light by Marx for its “tenacity” of resisting capitalism.

### ***Commune as Alterity***

According to Kevin Anderson, as Marx tried to “particularize” and “provincialize” Western European capitalism in his late period, he also began to accord the Asiatic Mode of Production with more “universal” significance, trying to expand this peculiar social formation of “commune” out of Asia to include non-Asian societies such as Slavonic, Rumanian, Mexico, Peru, Celts.<sup>15</sup> Perry Anderson was astonished by the “enormous inflation of the scope of Asiatic Mode of Production” in Marx’s late-stage thought that extended “chronologically backwards to the earliest dawn of civilization, and geographically outwards to the farther edge of tribal organization,” and which encompassed “such immensely disparate historical forms and epochs.” He thus comments that the “Asiatic Mode of Production” has become “less rigorous as a term”, and that “the inflation of ideas, like coins, merely leads to their devaluation.”<sup>16</sup> But Perry Anderson’s criticism is limited by his capacity as a historian – he tries to fix the “Asiatic Mode of Production” strictly to the specific geographical area of Asia and to accord it with a rigorous definition backed by the solid support of empirical evidence that actually existed in historical reality, but he fails to take into account the possibility that Marx might be consciously using the

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<sup>15</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 473.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 486-487

concept of “commune” or “Asiatic Mode of Production” (considered to be porous and unfounded by Perry Anderson) to discursively construct an “alterity” and “antithesis” to the European capitalism.

Especially after the violent repression of Paris Commune in 1871, seeing that there was little hope of revolution of industrial workers inside Western Europe and North America, Marx turned his gaze toward non-Western societies which had not yet been completely taken hold by capitalism, and placed on them the hope of overcoming capitalism and developing an alternative path. He even started to imagine how the archaic form of “Asiatic commune” could skip over the stage of capitalism and develop directly into the higher stage of “communism.”

For example, as shown by Haruki Wada, as early as 1872 to 1873, Marx had read and was impressed by Chernyshevskii’s *Essays on Communal Ownership of Land*, in which Chernyshevskii raised the idea that a “higher form” of society could be sought from “primitive forms” and that Russia could develop socialism directly out of the communal land ownership in Russia.<sup>17</sup> From then on, Marx was profoundly attracted to the Russian village commune and started to learn Russian. Later, in his reply to Vera Zasulich’s letter (1881), in which Zasulich asked Marx whether “it is historically necessary for every country in the world to pass through all the phases of capitalist production,” Marx explicitly stated that the so-called “historical inevitability” of the course of primitive accumulation is “expressly restricted to the countries of Western Europe.”<sup>18</sup> That Marx tried to limit the historical experience of

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<sup>17</sup> Haruki Wada, “Marx and Revolutionary Russia”, in *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Late Marx and the Russian Road*, ed. Teodor Shanin (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 48.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Marx, “Drafts of a reply,” in *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 124.

primitive accumulation to the particular case of Western Europe was also expressly shown in his letter to the editorial board of *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, in which he radically rejects the way of treating his *Capital* as “a historico-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples.”<sup>19</sup>

Before sending out his final reply to Zasulich, Marx wrote four drafts, in which he elaborated in detail his idea of how to develop communism on the basis of Russian communes. He listed several reasons for why Russia should preserve and develop its “village commune” instead of following the Western Europe’s path of primitive accumulation through expropriation of land. First, the historical situation of Russian society was essentially different from Western Europe in that it had a long tradition of cooperation and collective farming. Second, when Marx looked at Russian rural commune at this age, the existing Russian rural commune was a contemporary form that distinguished from the “archaic” formation – it was neither a pre-capitalist mode of production as elaborated in *Grundrisse*, nor an Asiatic mode which was “outside” capitalist history in the Indian notes; rather, having “survived all the vicissitudes of the Middle Ages and have maintained themselves up to the present day,” “the agricultural commune proved more capable of adapting and expanding, and of undergoing contact with strangers,” and hence compatible with socialized production.<sup>20</sup> Besides, the capitalism in Western Europe and the United States was undergoing a crisis, and the working masses are “seeking to break its chains by replacing capitalist with co-

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<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx, “A Letter to the Editorial Board of *Otechestvennye Zapiski*”, in *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 135.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Marx, “Drafts of a reply,” 108

operative production.”<sup>21</sup> All these, in Marx’s view, provided favorable condition for the modern transformation of Russian communes. For this purpose, Marx suggests, first, it is necessary to utilize the advanced technology of capitalist production; secondly it is necessary to overcome the “lack of connection between the lives of different communes” which resulted in their subjection to the despotic state.<sup>22</sup> Hence, Marx proposed, “there must be a Russian Revolution” to break the fetters of government and replace it with “a peasant assembly chosen by the communes themselves.”<sup>23</sup>

To some extent, we might say, Marx had projected onto Russian commune what he had hoped for Paris Commune, when he said in the letter that the working masses in Europe are “seeking to break its chains by replacing capitalist with co-operative production, and capitalist property with a higher form of the archaic type of property, that is, communist property.”<sup>24</sup> Anderson also shows, in Marx’s notes on Kovalevsky’s study of Algerian communal property in 1879, Marx compared the French colonizers who destroyed indigenous communities in Algeria to the French National Assembly who suppressed the Paris Commune, by calling the former “Rural” (a derisive term that French leftists addressed the French National Assembly). Hence, an implicit discursive link between Paris Commune and the archaic “commune” seemed to be established.<sup>25</sup> Besides, when writing about Paris Commune in 1871,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 102

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 121

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 111, 116.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 220.

Marx also consciously aligned it with the “mediaeval Communes,” remarking on their likeness in form.<sup>26</sup>

Marx’s political design for a modern commune is demonstrated in his view on Paris Commune in his article “The Civil War in France” (1871); he saw in Paris Commune a brand new form of social organization that could overcome capitalism and develop into communism. Commune is imagined by Marx as the alternative to the modern bourgeois state. The bourgeois state, in Marx’s view, carried from the mediaeval era the hierarchical structure as well as “huge national debts and crushing taxes”; under the circumstance of the class antagonism of capital and labor, the state has turned into “public force organized for social enslavement of an engine of class despotism” and “the national war-engine of capital against labor.”<sup>27</sup> Different from the State, the Commune has no bureaucracy, not standing army, no police; it is a democratic and egalitarian body free of all hierarchical structures. It is the “self-government of the producers.”<sup>28</sup> The standing army is replaced by a national militia, with an extremely short term of service. All public servants, including government officials, judges, magistrates, and police, are responsible agents elected through universal suffrage and revocable at short terms; while their salaries are the same as workers’ wages. As “a working-class government,” the Paris Commune has turned means of production, land and capital, from “means of enslaving and exploitation”

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<sup>26</sup> “It is generally the fate of completely new historical creations to be mistaken for the counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life, to which they may bear a certain likeness. Thus, this new Commune, which breaks the modern State power, has been mistaken for a reproduction of the mediaeval Communes, which first preceded, and afterwards became the substratum of, that very State power.” Karl Marx, “The Civil War in France,” in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels On the Paris Commune* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1991), 73.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 72.

into “instruments of free and associated labor,” and abolished the economic foundation of existence of class and class-rule.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, education and knowledge is also free and open to the public – “The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of Church and State,” and “science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it.”<sup>30</sup> In the commune, “with labor emancipated, every man becomes a working man, and productive labor ceases to be a class attribute.”<sup>31</sup>

To sum up, in Marx’s thought, “commune” denotes a pre-capitalist social formation characterized by the communal labor and communal property, in which individual is not a distinct form of existence from the commune. Among various types of communes, the “Asiatic Mode of Production” or “commune” characterized as or stood out as a peculiar type for its remarkable high degree of “unity” embodied in in the “despot” or “despotic regime,” the least degree of individuation, and the tenacious existence over the longest period. While in his early years Marx viewed such tenacity negatively as “oriental despotism” and “stagnation,” and held the modernist view that it was the historical necessity that all pre-capitalist mode of production should be destroyed and replaced by capitalist mode of production, in his late years, witnessing the failure of working class movement (especially Paris Commune) in Western Europe, Marx began to adopt a multi-linear view of development, and turned to non-Western

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 75.

societies for alternative. In this changing context, Asiatic Mode of Production was appreciated for its alterity and its stubborn resistance to capitalism.

### ***Discursive Positions about Chinese Commune for Later Marxists***

Since Marx showed an ambiguous towards “oriental despotism” in his early and major theoretical works, and since his scripts in his late years which paid attention to non-Western societies had not been discovered, translated, and published until recently, the multi-linear aspect of Marx’s thoughts have long been ignored. Besides, as his thoughts were put to practice in backward areas as a guidance for revolution and socialist state building, Marx’s theory had been read in wide variety of ways, generating controversies and debates. Accordingly, the conception of the “Asiatic Mode of Production” have been utilized by various discourses for different purposes. In this section, I will examine four major discourses constructed around AMP. My intention is not to discuss whether their knowledge or descriptions of AMP are accurate or not, but to show how these discourses try to make their own political statements by fixing “AMP” in a certain position within a certain power configuration. If we use Naoki Sakai’s concepts of “position” and “positionality,”<sup>32</sup> then we may say these discourses all try to fix or to ossify the AMP in certain power configurations – the totalitarian state, modernization, state capitalism, or cultural nationalism – in which AMP occupies an assigned “position” that functionally serves the logic of state or capital.

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<sup>32</sup> Naoki Sakai, “Positions and Positionalities: After Two Decades,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Winter 2012), 70-71.



(1) The Erasure of the concept of AMP in the debates of 1920s-30s

Above we have already elaborated Marx's two different attitudes towards AMP's differential character. One is to treat such difference as "stagnation" that must be erased by the unilinear scheme of progress, as shown in Marx's early writings such as "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in 1848 and "The British Rule in India" in 1853; the other is to appreciate the difference of the oriental society as an alternative to capitalism, as shown in his notes on non-Western society and his writings on Russian communes in late years. And Marx transitioned from the former to the latter. Although Marx intended to construct a multi-linear path of development in his late years, and to show a differential path of development towards "communism" for backward agrarian countries (with undeveloped capitalism), by imagining a brand new form of social organization based on "commune" and entirely rejecting the "State", for the Marxists and intellectuals in backward agrarian countries who longed for "modernization" and founding a modern state, such exclusion from the unilinear scheme of development amounted to precluding them from a "normal" path of advancement into a modern state and leaving their countries forever trapped in a "stagnation." Hence, once they took Marx's theory as a guideline for "modernization", Marx's effort of "particularizing" or "provincializing" Western Europe's path of capitalism was easily neglected or dismissed, while his disparaging description of "stagnation" in his early years kept haunting nationalists in backward countries. For this reason, the concept of "Asiatic Mode of Production" has met with denial and erasure in the discourse of oriental socialist states.

Studies of the debates of Asiatic Mode of Production in socialist states showed that, between 1925 and 1931 there were widespread discussions in the Soviet Union on the topic of the Asiatic Mode of Production. The distinctiveness of Asiatic Mode of Production as a separate category was brought up in 1925 by “Aziatchiki” (Russian sinologists who studied and sympathized with China), such as Evgenii S. Varga and Liudvig I. Mad’iar, Kokin and Papaian, who argued that Chinese society was not feudal but existed a distinctive “Asiatic Mode of Production” up until twentieth century. However, they were met with fierce attack on the Leningrad Conference of February, 1931, at which opponents of Asiatic Mode of Production accused them of failing to explain the transition from the Asiatic mode of production to the next stage of history within the categories of class struggle. Instead of treating AMP as a separate type of society distinct from other modes of production, they proposed to treat it as an Asiatic variant of slavery or feudalism.<sup>33</sup> About the reason of such fierce attack, Joshua Fogel explains, the discursive construction - how to determine the nature and stage of development of the society – was intimately linked with the revolutionary strategy to be taken, hence it was heavily invested with political meanings and intertwined with political struggles. At that time Soviet and Communist International was cooperating with Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) who represented the interest of the nationalist bourgeoisie, “if Chinese society could be characterized as feudal or semi-feudal, then a ‘bourgeois-democratic revolution’ was the order of the day, and an alliance with the ‘bourgeois’ Kuomintang, as demanded by the Comintern,

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<sup>33</sup> See Marian Sawyer, *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977); Joshua A. Fogel, “The Debates over the Asiatic Mode of Production in Soviet Russia, China, and Japan,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 1 (Feb, 1988), 56-79.

was appropriate. If, however, China could be described as ‘Asiatic,’ that meant China had a weak, underdeveloped bourgeoisie on which the revolutionary leadership could not safely rely; the peasants and the proletariat had to lead the revolution, and it could be socialist in aim.”<sup>34</sup> After the Leningrad Conference, the expression “Asiatic mode of production” began to disappear from the Soviet press.

However, Karl Wittfogel argues, the shunning and banning of the concept of AMP in Soviet Union has a stake far greater than Chinese revolution; the bureaucratic ruling class in Soviet Union was actually trying to conceal the fact that Soviet Union had inherited from Tsarist the structure of a despotic state, to “hide the primary problem of bureaucratic class rule and general state slavery” in Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup> At the time of discussion, Soviet Union was embarking on the nationalization of land and building a “managerial-bureaucratic Asiatic state,”<sup>36</sup> hence, it tried to suppress the concept of AMP, so as not to invoke any impression that Soviet Union was in fact a restoration of Asiatic state. Although Wittfogel’s comment, deeply informed by Max Weber, is oriented by his strong bias against Communism and a favorable attitude towards Western democracy, he nevertheless illuminates on the important fact that AMP, as a differential type of social formation distinct from capitalist state, obstructs the Soviet Union’s effort of building a strong socialist state. Wittfogel’s view constitutes a popular narrative during Cold War that Soviet and China’s socialism was a repetition/restoration of oriental despotism, proving the stagnate character of

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<sup>34</sup> Joshua A. Fogel, “The Debates over the Asiatic Mode of Production in Soviet Russia, China, and Japan”, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 1 (Feb, 1988), 58.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), 404.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

Oriental society which was unable to “progress” into the modern (capitalist) society. His narrative actually served the “modernization” discourse prevailing in the area studies.

But what is more interesting, Chinese revolutionaries in 1930s did not favor the concept of Asiatic Mode of Production very much either. According to Arif Dirlik, the views of Mad’iar, Varga, and Wittfogel that advocated for the distinctiveness of Asiatic Mode of Production were not very popular in China and the reactions to it were mostly negative. Modernization paradigm has deeply influenced the Chinese Marxists in the period; therefore, they tended to treat it “as a variant of one or the other forms of production, as in a special feudal society.”<sup>37</sup> For them, to be named as Asiatic Mode of Production is to be excluded from the path of historical progression and precluded development. Most of them were committed to the scheme of European development in which capitalism inevitably followed the dissolution of the feudal system. Thus, when they discussed why China had such a long imperial period from Zhou up to twentieth century and did not develop indigenous capitalism, they were reluctant to use the name of “Asiatic” and preferred to use the term “feudalism” to describe the extremely long imperial period. At any rate, the intention to erase the distinctive character of AMP or to insert it into the scheme of historical progression to highlight its transition was obvious.

## (2) Modernization Narrative in North America and post-80s China

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<sup>37</sup> Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History: The Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 101.

Compared to the evasion of the concept in the East, AMP was intentionally applied to East Asian studies in North America for particular ideological reasons. Indeed, during the Cold War, the Hegelian color inherent in the “oriental despotism” was highlighted and transformed into a modernization narrative, which prevailed in the discipline of area studies in North America. As Rebecca Karl terms it, China studies in North America has turned into a “Weberianized version of Hegel ... a version that was simplified through the Parsonian appropriation of Weber as a theorist of capitalist modernization,” in which China’s “long-lived imperial political, economic, and cultural formations were accordingly seen as enduringly stable as well as impervious to a transition to the modern.”<sup>38</sup> The differential character of AMP, which had been viewed by Marx with hope as a socialist/communist alternative to overcome the repressive capitalist modernity, now is rendered into a historical anomaly that needs to be erased by the unilinear history of capitalist modernity.

In his famous work *Oriental Despotism*, Wittfogel associated “Asiatic Mode of Production” with the “totalitarianism” of Socialist state and its bureaucratic ruling class. What makes the USSR strikingly similar to the Asiatic “agrodespotic society,” Wittfogel argues, is that they are both “total managerial and dictatorial states”<sup>39</sup> characterized by “the monopolistic position of its ruling bureaucracy.”<sup>40</sup> The “total statism” of oriental despotism in fact has another name, “state capitalism.”<sup>41</sup> Especially, Lenin’s nationalization of land and collectivization of agriculture are

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<sup>38</sup> Rebecca E. Karl, “The Asiatic Mode of Production: National and Imperial Formations,” *Histoirein: A Review of the Past and Other Stories*, vol. 5 (2005), 59.

<sup>39</sup> Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*, 440.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 441.

viewed as restoration of the “semi-Asiatic order.”<sup>42</sup> Wittfogel says: “Even prior to the collectivization of agriculture, the Soviet *apparatchiki* disposed over a mechanized system of communication and industry that made their semimanagerial position different from and potentially superior to the semimanagerial position of an agrohydraulic bureaucracy. The nationalized industrial apparatus of the new semimanagerial order provided them with new weapons of organization, propaganda, and coercion, which enabled them to liquidate the small peasant producers as an economic category. The completed collectivization transformed the peasants into agricultural workers who toil for a single master: the new apparatus state.”<sup>43</sup> Since Wittfogel, it has become a common practice to link “totalitarianism” and “despotism” to socialist state, and to describe socialist state as the regressive restoration of an archaic society. Wittfogel’s view have dominated both 1980s China and the area studies in North America, both of which were full of the urge to “modernize” the Chinese state and to eradicate the “alterity” of socialism.

In order to understand the revival of AMP discourse in Chinese context, we need to revisit the discourse of modernization in the Chinese context of the 1980s. He Guimei points out, the “New Enlightenment” intellectuals in 1980s China, ardently embracing the idea of “modernization”, cut off Mao’s socialist period (1950s to 1970s) as an aberrant period, while treated 1980s as a period of “New Enlightenment” and connected it directly to the May Fourth Movement (regarded as China’s “Enlightenment”) to form a smooth “history” of “modernization” and “enlightenment”. Representative examples included the famous TV documentary *River Elegy* [Heshang]

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 391-92.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 440.

(1988), and the book *The Cycle of Growth and Decline: On the Ultra-Stable Structure of Chinese Society* by Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng.<sup>44</sup> And even today, it is common for Chinese intellectuals to treat Mao Zedong's socialist practices as regressive restoration of premodern "despotism" or "feudalism," and to see socialist modernity as an unfinished modernization project, at a time when China was charged with modernization impulse to re-integrate itself into the "international world" which was then the global capitalist system. A representative figure is Qin Hui, a historian of Chinese ancient history. Qin compares the socialist agricultural cooperative in Mao's China to the premodern patriarchal kinship community, which were characterized by the lack of individual freedom and private property, as well as subservience to the rule of an "autocratic state", or the "grand clan."<sup>45</sup> Imperial China, Qin says, was characterized by the existence of a "despotic" state. "The upper class exploited the peasantry, not through its position as proprietors of land or capital, but via the state, which operated like an omni-community ruling the whole population through its tax-registration system."<sup>46</sup> In the "Asiatic state," "the state organizes the processes of production and distribution with extra-economic means of force, mobilizing labor and products on massive scale."<sup>47</sup> Qin is particularly critical of the egalitarianism between rich and poor regions, to Qin, such "egalitarianism" is a result of the notorious practice

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<sup>44</sup> See He Guimei, *Xinqimeng Zhishi Dang'an: Bashì Niandai Wenhua Yanjiu* 新启蒙知识档案: 八十年代中国文化研究 (The Archival Knowledge Archive of New Enlightenment: Cultural Studies of 1980s' China) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Qin Hui, "Dividing the Big Family Assets," *New Left Review*, no. 20, March-April 2003, 94.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>47</sup> Qin Hui, *Tianyuanshi yu Kuangxiangqu: Guanzhong Moshi yu Qianjindai Shehui de Zairensi*, 田园诗与狂想曲: 关中模式与前近代社会的再认识 (*Idyll and Rhapsody: Guanzhong Mode and Reexamination of Premodern Society*) (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 1996), 115.

of “levelling” (ping diao, 平调) by the centralized despotic state, which tended to impose heavier tax on richer regions to help the less developed regions.<sup>48</sup>

Especially, Qin extracts from Marx’s *Grundrisse* a teleological view of history to serve the narrative of “modernization.” He holds that it is Marx’s “basic view” that there was an “evolution of members of the community into independent individuals”<sup>49</sup>:

In the *Grundrisse*, he [Marx] famously declares that ‘the more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole.’ In his view the evolution of the ‘wholes’ passed through successive forms, from the single family to the tribe and then, through ‘conflict and fusion’, into the total unity, squatting above all smaller communities, that was the ‘Asian state’. In all these formations, personal character is suppressed; individuals are merely parts attached to the whole, as property of the community; and from individual dependence on the community, there derives the attachment of all its members to the patriarchal figure at their head.<sup>50</sup>

Under the “modernization” framework, Qin Hui takes “individual’s dependence on the community,” rather than property relations, to be the defining feature of premodern community. And accordingly, he views individual’s breaking away from community to be the defining feature of modern society. Individual’s self-consciousness comes from private property, and “freedom” of individuals is based on the exchange relations and contractual relations between free individuals; hence, commodity economy constitutes the conditions of “freedom.” “On one hand, human’s socialized character cannot develop without the exchange and association of goods (commodities); on the other hand, human’s individuality cannot be formed without

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>49</sup> Qin, “Dividing the Big Family Assets,” 94.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



shedding its affiliation with patriarchal community.”<sup>51</sup> Hence, he suggests, we should “replace patriarchal natural economy with commodity economy, replace patriarchal community with free private ownership.”<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, he views the Chinese economic reform in 1980s – the disintegration of People’s Commune, the rise of commodity economy, and the emergence of individualism – as a progressive transition from “premodern” to “modern.” By dissolving the socialist cooperative and partitioning land among peasants as their private property, peasants can turn themselves into individuals. Such “historical development,” he asserts, is “a process from non-freedom to freedom – in Marx’s words, from the ‘dependence’ to the ‘independence of Man.’”<sup>53</sup>

But, my discussions above have shown that such characterization of AMP by Marx may largely be discursive and metaphorical rather than empirical and factual. Also, Marx in *Grundrisse* has paid due attention to the private aspect of “communal property,” that is, the individual member is a “*possessor* of a particular part”, and that “any fraction of the property belongs to him only as immediate member of the commune,” and thus “what exists is only communal *property*, and only *private possession*.”<sup>54</sup> Clearly, Marx’s nuanced description of the “private possession” of communal property has not been taken into account by Qin’s argument, and accordingly the more historical problem of “individual” within the socialist commune, as we will see in Zhao Shuli’s novel, is also absent in Qin’s narrative. Hence, Qin’s

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<sup>51</sup> Qin, *Tianyuanshi yu Kuangxiangqu*, 119.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>53</sup> Qin, “Dividing the Big Family Assets,” 101.

<sup>54</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 477.

study is less a serious historical study than a discursive statement expressed from a certain positionality.

The area studies in North America is also dominated by such a modernization narrative, characterized by the binary of “despotic state” versus “individual freedom,” “premodern” versus “modern,” as part and parcel of Cold War discourse. For example, Haiyan Lee’s recent book, *The Strangers and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, building on numerous scholarship from the field of sociology and area studies which were fundamentally shaped by the “modernization theory,” also repeats such a banal binary of “modern capitalism” versus “premodern socialism.” In her view, Chinese socialist state was still trapped in the form of traditional society characterized by the “centrality of kinship and territorial ties as structuring principles of social, political, and moral life.”<sup>55</sup> Since China did not go through the “breakup of primordial forms of social organization and the greater differentiation of social roles attendant upon the greater division of labor,”<sup>56</sup> there does not exist the essence of sociality within Chinese society. In a language reminiscent of “oriental despotism,” she characterizes that the socialist has “expropriated individual moral capacity and subjugated morality to power-administered laws and totalitarian self-sameness” by “bind(ing) the populace vertically to the state while vitiating horizontal ties and the civil society they bind together.”<sup>57</sup> As such, Lee successfully establishes a “modernizing” narrative of a linear, progressive developmental frame, in which China should shed its regressive and “provincial” character of “exclusivity and conformity” and progress into a modern and

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<sup>55</sup> Haiyan Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 5.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 4.

open civil society of stranger sociality, which can only be brought about by the transformative force of “globalization” and “cosmopolitanism” through instituting the relation of exchange and contract.<sup>58</sup> Clearly, in treating socialist period as a repetition of the primordial kinship society, Lee is repeating Wittfogel’s narrative. By treating socialist China as a static, archaic formation that has not yet been through a Weberian path of “modernization”, such narrative amounts to a complete denial of China’s socialist history.

### (3) Multiculturalism and Cultural Nationalism of AMP

Both Qin and Lee’s ideological positionality as “modernization proponents” are clearly articulated and can easily be detected. By simply attributing “premodern” and “regressive” character to socialist China, both Qin and Lee’s arguments serve the typical “modernization” theory with the metaphor of Asiatic commune, which takes the Western bourgeois society as the paradigmatic example. The multi-linearism of socialism is erased to give way to the unilinear historical path of capitalism. But even some kind of recognition of Asiatic mode of Production as an alternative beyond the unilinear historical path of capitalism, for example, as shown in the resurgence of discourse of Asiatic Mode of Production in China since 1980s, also contains the possibility of flattening and reducing AMP’s implication of the alternative political economic relations (which may challenge and overcome capitalism) into a logic of multiculturalism and cultural nationalism, which inversely reinforce the universality and invincibility of global capitalism.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 181.

Here, it is necessary to bring in Karl's observation in her recent discussion of the reemergence of AMP. She notes that "the waning of revolutionary historical paradigms; the rise of more nationalistic modernizationist ones after Mao Zedong's death (1976); and the re-orientation of Chinese socio-economics in the nineteen eighties curiously facilitated the return of the AMP to historiographical attention."<sup>59</sup> She notes, since its return in 1980s, AMP has come to be combined with the present "anti-revolution" atmosphere and the global trend of transnational capitalism, and has turned into a kind of multiculturalism which reinforces and endorses the invincibility of global capitalism.

For Karl, such undermining of AMP's alterity is done from both sides, from left and from the right. On one hand, leftist critical theorists (such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt), in their theorizing about the contemporary condition of capitalism, ends up treating capitalism as an "eternal present" that cannot be overcome, and has given up seeking real historical alternatives from the uneven development of historical capitalism. Such theorization, Karl criticizes, "cannot account for the historical unevenness produced in and by capitalism as a global formation" and "precisely erase the historicity of the coextensive relationship between formal and real subsumption that forms the core of the historical movement of capital globally."<sup>60</sup> Though "these theories of an eternal present of capital/empire present themselves as an opening to politics," yet they are "really only a politics of systemic regeneration."<sup>61</sup> I will discuss the weaknesses and limits of the Marxist discourse of "uneven development" in part

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<sup>59</sup> Karl, "The Asiatic Mode of Production," 60.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 64.

four of this section, but here it is necessary to pay attention to Karl's critique of certain sort of post-structuralist and post-colonialist thinking. "Formal subsumption" and the emphasis of "historical movement of global capitalism" actually leaves room for rethinking the coexistence of different modes of production, that is, different temporalities, in the same structural totality. Could the "commune" be a real "outside"? As what I will discuss later, Negri and Hardt's discussion about "commune" has too easily dismissed the real historical experience of the construction of commune in the East, as in the historical context of both Russian Chinese. For them, any political change, any difference, would simply turn into "systemic regeneration" of capital itself, without posing real challenge to the relations of production.

Karl finds, while capitalism is increasingly recognized as a universal existence that cannot be transcended, AMP is increasingly bound with the "nation-time (diachronic chronology) and nation-spaces (geographic unity)" and reduced to cultural nationalism. "The AMP came to be incipiently articulated as both a nationalized theory of historical difference – multilinearity – and a comparative theory of (nationally-inflected) imperial formations."<sup>62</sup> There was thus the peculiar convergence of AMP (Asiatic Mode of Production) and CMP (Capitalist Mode of Production), of values (cultural values) and value (capital), in which the differential Asiatic Mode of Production simply constituted one of the various moments of the "local instantiations" of global capitalism. Here Karl mainly refers to the debates on "Neo-Confucianism" in the 1990s, but we could also think of other kinds of "configuration of West and Rest"

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 66.

pointed out by Naoki Sakai;<sup>63</sup> therefore, “the peculiar contemporary appeal of multilinearity appears as a reified meta-historical truism and even compensatory gesture in this era of global capital.”<sup>64</sup>

Worse still, such cultural nationalist logic was embraced and reinforced by Chinese intellectuals and even Chinese officials, who now proudly praise China’s uniqueness for its long-lasting imperial formations. Karl criticizes, many Chinese intellectuals “attempt to articulate ‘uniqueness’ as exceptionalism in Weberianized Marxist terms by drawing on a culturalist-statist conceit of origins,” by which “China’s exceptionalist past becomes a basis for a reconceptualization of Chinese history as the origin of all world history. ... Meanwhile, these theories also proclaim the cultural difference of China as adequate explanation not only for China’s past but also for the necessity of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics.’”<sup>65</sup> With the success of Chinese economic development in the last forty years and the natural revival of national confidence in terms of national culture, nowadays, the AMP can be seen as a positive descriptor of cultural strength, instead of a shameful deviation from normality. Under such circumstance, the return of what is called transhistorical theories of empire and Confucian modernization, though under the guise of both critical and celebratory ‘globalization’ theory, for Karl only endorsed the explanatory power of global capitalism with Chinese (cultural) character.

What’s more, even if the alterity of AMP is appreciated by critical thinkers for challenging the totalizing logic of capital, Karl criticizes, such difference of AMP is

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<sup>63</sup> See Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On Japan and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>64</sup> Karl, “The Asiatic Mode of Production,” 62

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 68

not explored in terms of “materialist historical” significance but appreciated for cultural significance. Here we can easily recall what Gayatri Spivak has casted upon AMP. Let me briefly introduce Spivak’s conception of AMP here. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak appreciates AMP for its significance of denoting “alterity,” as an attempt by Marx to account for difference, in answer to the question “why did the normative logic of Capital not determine itself in the same way everywhere? ...why is there difference? ... why is ‘Europe’ not the only self-identical ‘same’?”<sup>66</sup> However, she thinks Marx’s effort to account for this difference only serves his purpose to sublate it dialectically, to remove its difference. In Spivak’s view, Marx’s thoughts have never really got rid of the Hegelian dialectic of “position – negation – sublation,” which sought to absorb and negate difference. Even “primitive communism,” in which Marx tried to seek for the otherness for capitalism, is considered by Spivak as “a version of the selfsame, man in nature as species-being, one foot into history.”<sup>67</sup> In Spivak’s view, Marx simply stands for another variation of the European “self-same,” trying to impose his speculative philosophy onto the heterogeneous history (by naming and accounting for the historical difference) and reduce its complexity and heterogeneity, and to use this speculative philosophy as a blueprint for social justice and a guide for human practice, in order to create the “universal world,” in which the real minorities like subaltern women have no place. “Marx will be in search of a system that will remove difference after taking it into account. Thus the exigency of accounting for difference lies at the heart of Marx’s

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<sup>66</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 72.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 82

system.”<sup>68</sup> As for Marx’s followers in the socialist states, Spivak thinks they all tried to pursue a “universal world” that erase differences like Marx, and their social engineering and state planning all entailed the “persistent sublation or *différance* of capitalism.” For Lenin, this universal world is the Soviet State; for Stalin, this universal world is the Slavonic nation; and for Mao Zedong, this universal world is the proletariat culture.<sup>69</sup> At any rate, Spivak considers Marx to be a modernizationist and obsessed with a unilinear scheme of development – “Marx too thought that capitalist colonialism would shock the Asiatic Mode of Production into normative historical evolution so that unilinear resistance could begin.”<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, appreciating AMP’s “otherness,” Spivak proposes to use AMP as “a kind of deconstructive lever to open up Marx’s text in a de-constructive way.”<sup>71</sup> For example, she points out that Marx, in talking about colonial trade, has reduced value to the “money form” of value, while neglecting “the total or expanded form of value.” The “total and expanded form”, including the “cognitive, cultural, political, or affective value production”, would disrupt the logic of capital and constitute part of the “global resistance to ‘Development’ from below.”<sup>72</sup> To this extent, AMP should be taken as an alternative system of values and an unassimilable text or desire which become the perfect agent for ‘decoding’ capitalism. “The heterogeneous and uneven social texture of what was given the convenient nomenclature of ‘the Asiatic Mode of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 103.



Production’ can then be seen ... as differentiated sites of similar conflicts between the general and the total or expanded forms of value.”<sup>73</sup>

As we can see, when Spivak calls for us to overcome the reductive logic of exchange and pay attention to the “cognitive, cultural, political, or affective value production,” there is already a turn from “economic” to “culture.” Therefore, Karl criticizes, for Spivak, “the utility of AMP as a concept thus becomes a textual utility: a way to restore a textually understood cultural/national difference to supposed AMP countries, primarily India.”<sup>74</sup> To Karl, Spivak’s appreciation for AMP’s alterity is not much different from cultural nationalism, to which perhaps we can also add Dipesh Chakrabarty’s attempt of recuing “History 2” from “History 1.”<sup>75</sup> Karl has a point in arguing that the significance of AMP should not be limited to the textual or representational world, but instead should be sought from the “material historical process” of uneven development, of how the pre- or non-capitalist formation was restructured by and unevenly subsumed into capitalism through imperialism and formal subsumption, for which she raised historical studies of Claude Meillassoux and Samir Amin as exemplary works. To Karl, the “material historical process” as well as its problematic representation in the real history of East has been reduced to a meaningless repetition (state capitalism or others) in the “eternal present” of capital/empire (as in the theory of Negri and Hardt), or has been obscured by the textural representation of the uncoded culture under the rhetoric of cultural capitalism or even the analysis of post-colonialism.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>74</sup> Karl, “The Asiatic Mode of Production,” 70

<sup>75</sup> See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

#### (4) Agrarian Commune as Means of Primitive Accumulation

As a Marxist historian, Karl pays special attention to the material historical aspect of AMP as an alternative mode of relations to capitalism, and is on guard against any attempt that reduces the alterity of AMP to mere cultural difference that reinforces rather than undermines global capitalism. However, as a historian, due to her biased attitude towards literary text, in dismissing it as “fictitious” and irrelevant to reality, she underestimates the intricate relationship between the “world of things” and the “world of words.” The essential issue here returns to the “idealism” or “determinism” of the Marxist theory of “uneven development.” Marxist scholars always consider agrarian commune as means of primitive accumulation, but is it not another representation of reality, or in other words, an institutionalized testimony, a kind of statement about historical positions in the real and therefore unrepresentable history? Literary texts indeed have a more nuanced relationship to reality, and as Derrida would show us, fiction in nature can be very close in nature to moment of testimony, and thus the moment of contradiction and openness. Let us first look into the theoretical observation by the discourse of “uneven development.”

Allow me to start from an intersection, a benign recognition of capitalism in socialism. Actually since 2000s, as China became increasingly integrated into the global capitalist system, and as the polemical Cold-War ideology dissipated in the post-Cold-War period (or, in Rebecca Karl’s word, in the atmosphere of “Goodbye to revolution”), there has been a tendency in scholarship that tends to tone down the political nature of Mao Zedong’s socialist project and tend to re-examine and re-

evaluate Mao's socialism in terms of its economic achievement of "modernization," and to rethink its functional role of capitalist accumulation in socialist China. Such scholarship, mainly in the field of history and economics, tends to put aside the "political values" of socialism and discuss it from the utilitarian perspective of economic function. In this light, socialism is not so much different from socialist state, and since any state would undergo a process of primitive accumulation, hence socialism is not so much different from state capitalism. Viewed in this light, the collectivization and agricultural commune then served as indispensable means of primitive accumulation for a socialist state which lacks capital.

Under such a spectrum, Wen Tiejun's empirical study is representative. He and his research team in their recent researches argue that that rural area has played an important role for China's "internal primitive accumulation." They argue that, for any sovereign state, state industrialization is the condition for the independence of state sovereignty, and any industrialization would need capitalist accumulation; most underdeveloped states would have to rely on the economic aid of foreign countries to accomplish such accumulation, which often result in their political dependence on foreign capital. However, in order to protect its hard-won state sovereignty, China chose the path of "internal primitive accumulation," by extracting surplus value from the vast rural area to support the state's industrialization. The collectivization movement was in essence the most efficient measure for extracting surplus value from peasantry; it was necessary to organize peasants into economic unit of "agrarian commune," because the "transaction cost" with the numerous small peasants scattered over a vast area would simply be too high for the state, and also because the collective

labor in the unit of commune was able to generate extra surplus product for the consumption of urban population.<sup>76</sup> Besides accumulation, Wen also argues, rural area has consistently provided solutions for the capitalist crises in the city – eight economic crises throughout China’s course of modernization. For example, in 1958, when Soviet Union drastically reduced its economic aid to China and caused the shortage of capital, China managed to sustain the capitalist accumulation by maximizing the input of labor power into the production. This economic purpose was realized through the hyper-political movement of “Great Leap Forward,” in which the political ideology of “class struggle” and “continuous revolution” was utilized to mobilize the masses in economic production.<sup>77</sup> And in the economic depression of 1961-1962, when the recession of urban economy resulted in drastic decrease of employment rates, to relieve the pressure of urban economy China sent a part of urban population to the countryside to participate agricultural production. The same situation happened again in 1968-1970, this time in the name of “re-education of intellectual youths.”<sup>78</sup> To sum up Wen’s view, the existence of a vast rural area, which undertakes for urban capitalism the cost of capitalist accumulation under the dual structure of rural-urban system, is the “comparative advantage” of China for its primitive accumulation and fast industrialization. It is too hasty to conclude that Wen and his group endorse the

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<sup>76</sup> Wen Tiejun, *Baci weiji: Zhongguo de zhenshi jingyan* 八次危机：中国的真实经验 1949-2009 (Eight Crises: Lessons from China, 1949-2009) (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2012), 5. According to him, the collectivization movement in agriculture was not driven by the need of agriculture and peasantry themselves. The ‘modernization of agriculture’ was demanded by the department of urban industry, which in essence was ‘collectivization’ combined with ‘mechanization.’ Its purpose was to establish ‘advanced commune’ based on the administrative unit of township, to use the land in large scale, so that the unequal exchange between the two departments of industry and agriculture could be realized, for the purpose of extracting agricultural surplus for internal primitive accumulation.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 53-54

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 57, 68.

“primitive accumulation in socialist state”; for them, the primitive accumulation is rather a kind of necessary evil which needs to be counteracted by the socialist good. However, their scientific study and indifferent tone distinguish them from the Marxist critics, who have a similar observation about the historical process of “primitive accumulation” in the history of socialist China but have a more critical attitude.

Here, it is interesting to mention Lin Chun’s slightly different and yet also ambiguous standpoint about primitive accumulation. Lin Chun’s study of socialist China also confirms that China’s primitive accumulation was built on the mass sacrifice of peasantry. She said, China finished its primitive accumulation (of state capitalism) “through sacrificing rural development and exploiting the peasantry.”<sup>79</sup> Specifically, Lin argues, it was done through the unequal “scissor price” in the exchange between the industry and agriculture, by trading the cheapened agricultural products with more expensive industrial goods.<sup>80</sup> With the statist monopoly over the purchase of agricultural products, a quasi-segregation system between urban and rural residents was established. Besides, the wages and consumption in the rural areas had to be suppressed and the countryside subordinated to urban demands, for the purpose of sustaining an internally generated high accumulation rate. Hence, comparing with Wen’s scientific study, we can detect an intensified tone of criticism. For Lin, the so-called socialist primitive accumulation did not radically differ from classical

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<sup>79</sup> Lin Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 66.

<sup>80</sup> “The Chinese government until early 1980s imposed near state monopoly over the purchase and marketing of grain, cotton, and other main agricultural products and permitted a quasi-segregation system between urban and rural residents. By administratively categorizing and confining people into those who consumed commodity grain and those who produced it while keeping the rest for self-consumption, the system enabled a rapid process of industrial growth and the construction of cities. The agrarian surplus was squeezed by the state to finance industry and other investment priorities.” Lin, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*, 67.

capitalism in terms of the intensity of “extraction” of the countryside, leaving only enough food for peasants’ subsistence.<sup>81</sup> Lin’s main argument is by no means the disavowal of socialist China, but once she uses “primitive accumulation” as a weapon of critique, the Marxist critique could be easily and dangerously reduced into the established position as state slavery of “oriental despotism,” or, a type of state capitalism in which peasants were reduced as “agricultural workers for the state” “who owns no property and produces food to be distributed on a national scale,” as illustrated in Negri and Hardt’s criticism of socialist modernization.<sup>82</sup>

To some extent, both Wen and Lin’s explanations are well-grounded by the theory of uneven development. According to the theory of uneven development, it is the law of capitalism that capital needs an “outside,” a non-capitalist sphere for accumulation. Rosa Luxemburg points out, Marx leaves out the important question of “expanded production” in his construction of the theoretical model of capitalism, in which he presumes “the universal and exclusive domination of capitalist production”<sup>83</sup> and considers primitive accumulation to be a one-time event, which will cease to exist once the capitalist mode of production is established. Luxemburg discovers, Marx’s diagram of the two departments of capitalist society fails to answer “how does capital realize the surplus value,” or, “how does capital accumulate.” Luxemburg argues, the surplus value cannot be realized by workers or capitalists; to realize surplus value, capital needs a “third person”, that is, “consumers other than the immediate agents of

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 118.

<sup>83</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 364

capitalist production (i.e. workers and capitalists).”<sup>84</sup> This extra demand for the consumption of the portion of surplus value essential for expanded production, in Luxemburg’s view, can only come from the non-capitalist strata. Luxemburg analyzes, the process of accumulation, as an elastic and spasmodic process, “requires inevitably free access to ever new areas of raw materials in case of need,” and “only on the pre-capitalist soil of more primitive social conditions can it develop the ascendancy necessary to achieve such miracles.”<sup>85</sup> Besides, the accumulation of capital needs the supply of living labour which can be mobilized by capital to meet its demands. That is to say, when capital expands in leaps and bounds, the raw materials and labor population the capital needs must also increase in leaps and bounds too; and this cannot possibly come from natural propagation of population, but must come from the “social reservoirs outside the dominion of capital,” which “is drawn into the wage proletariat only if need arises.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore, for Luxemburg and many Marxist such as Rebecca Karl, only the existence of non-capitalist outside can provide additional labour power and the consumers for the realization of capitalist accumulation. Hence, the accumulation of capital becomes impossible at all points without non-capitalist surroundings. This need for the “outside” is the inherent drive for the expansion of capitalism into imperialism – “Capital needs the means of production and the labour power of the whole globe for untrammelled accumulation; it cannot manage without the natural resources and the labour power of all territories.”<sup>87</sup> Such a classic theory of

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 365.

“primitive accumulation” is still the most influential one among the Marxist scholars of political economy.

That capitalism always needs the “outside” for accumulation implies that capitalism is always an “uneven” and “asymmetrical” structure in which capitalist mode production must always co-exist and articulate with non-capitalist mode of production. As David Harvey points out, “imperial practices, from the perspective of capitalist logic, are typically about exploiting the uneven geographical conditions under which capital accumulation occurs and also taking advantage of ... the ‘asymmetries’ that inevitably arise out of the spatial exchange relations.”<sup>88</sup> Moreover, he shows, such “uneven geography” and “asymmetry” is not necessarily given naturally but could be actively generated and reinforced: “Uneven geographical conditions do not merely arise out of the uneven patterning of natural resource endowments and locational advantages, but, ever more importantly, are produced by the uneven ways in which wealth and power themselves become highly concentrated in certain places by virtue of asymmetrical exchange relations.”<sup>89</sup> Or, as Neil Smith puts it, capitalism creates its own geography; it is not the geographical differentiation that determines the capitalism, rather, it is capitalism that generates the internal differentiation of geographical space.<sup>90</sup>

Such distinction of “inside” and “outside” of the uneven structure of capitalism is manufactured and sustained by “border.” “Border” can thus be understood as a crucial device for accumulation and primitive accumulation. As Gavin Walker points

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<sup>88</sup> David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 31.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>90</sup> Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens, Georgia: 2008), 84-85.



out, primitive accumulation is “the process of the formation and capture of difference, the making-equivalent of difference in order to set in motion the circuit-process of ... capitalist development.”<sup>91</sup> Primitive accumulation is in essence “the closure of heterogeneity - the simple and pure space of difference as such - in order to produce specific difference, equivalences that can then ‘encounter’ each other.”<sup>92</sup> To be more specific, “border” is a result of the practice of “bordering,” which “order” and “re-codes” the heterogeneity into commensurable differences of “capital” and “labor,” so that they could encounter each other in the circuit of capitalist production. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson conceptualize “border” in a more sophisticated way and use it as the crucial analytical tool to observe contemporary capitalism. They point out, borders are “finely tuned instruments for managing, calibrating, and governing global passages of people, money, and things.”<sup>93</sup> Border, does not just blocks, obstructs, or excludes, but also selects, filters, and includes; it governs and regulates the flow of people, money, and goods and hence “play(s) a key role in producing the times and space of global capitalism.”<sup>94</sup> Insofar as capital needs the “outside” and “non-capitalist” spheres to realize its accumulation, border, which has the capacity to “hierarchize” and “stratify” the global space, serves as a mechanism and device to create “frontiers of capital” to facilitate capitalist accumulation.<sup>95</sup>

If we adopt the perspective of “uneven development” and “border,” then the unique formation of “commune” can be understood to be located in a subtle position –

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<sup>91</sup> Gavin Walker, *The Sublime Perversion of Capital* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 79.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Sandro Mezzadra, Brett Neilson, *Border as Method: or the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 241.

commune is both “inside” and “outside” the capitalist order, but in a determinist way. It will not be difficult for us to find the internal border in China where commune is positioned as the “internal outside” of the capitalist development in China. For a country which does not have oversea colony, the rural-urban divide in China can be understood as a mechanism of “bordering” which “re-codes” the Chinese nation into a hierarchical order of the “non-capitalist” sphere of countryside, which supplies raw material and labor power, and the “capitalist” sphere of the city, which supplies capital. The uneven structure is most manifest in what Dorothy Solinger calls the “dual citizenship” of rural and urban citizens, created by the household registration system, or the *hukou* system (户口), which “codes” city and countryside as the equivalent of “capital” and “non-capital.” According to Solinger’s study, under the hukou system, “residence status became an ascribed, inherited one, determining an individual’s entire livelihood and welfare simply on the basis of where the registration was located.”<sup>96</sup> Solinger finds, during the socialist period, whether one resided in the country or in the city determined difference in “the quality of goods supplied, the transportation conditions, the range of cultural entertainment, the nature of education offered, and the type of health care one received.”<sup>97</sup> While urban citizens enjoy “a range of benefits and entitlements” which Solinger called the “urban public goods regime,”<sup>98</sup> peasants were organized into agricultural communes and were responsible for their own medical care, pension, and education. As such, the household registration system established a “border” between the city and the country, through which the city is

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<sup>96</sup> Dorothy J. Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China: Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 36.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 9

“coded” as “capitalist sphere,” concentrated with industrial capital and social welfare facilities, while the countryside is “coded” as “non-capitalist” sphere, with no welfare provided by the state. The relation of city and countryside hence resembles that of the “center” and the “periphery.” In the first chapter I will discuss how the *hukou* system and the agrarian commune served for the state’s primitive accumulation as the capital’s “outside.” In the second chapter I will talk about in the rapid expansion of capitalism of 1990s, and how such “unevenness” of capitalism is manifested in the specific group of “rural migrants.” In the third chapter I will discuss, in the new phase since 2000, how the effort of “re-collectivization” and the imagination of “common” continues to generate the “outside” of capital. In this light, the persistence of agrarian commune and the incomplete capitalization or modernization of rural area, can be explained by their status as the “outside,” a “non-capitalist sphere” that serves a utilitarian role in the the overall “uneven” structure of state capitalism, providing the urban capital with raw material and labor power.

If under the paradigm of modernization theory, AMP needs to be wiped out to force the Asia to enter the History, and if under certain cultural nationalist discourse and post-structuralist discourse the AMP can only exist in the omnipresent and “eternal present” of capitalism, then, the theory of primitive accumulation rationalizes the existence of commune, as the indispensable “outside” for the formal and real subsumption of capitalism. However, is it not another kind of erasure of real alterity of “commune”?

As I enter the specific historical moment and the complex world of the literary works, I find that the theory of political economics lacks the ability to explain

historical complexity. Generally speaking, the problem of such narrative is its “economic determinism,” which subjects everything to the universal law of “capital,” and completely eliminates the various alterities under the ambiguous name of socialism. In such a reductive analysis, even the socialist values of egalitarianism and mass democracy, which aim to challenge the capitalist logic, are viewed as efficient means for mass mobilization that increase the intense input of human labor to realize capitalist accumulation of an underdeveloped state, serving the economic goal of building a stronger state. In this narrative of “modernization,” Mao Zedong’s socialist period is sutured with the post-Mao reform period to form a smooth continuous process, a linear progression whose ultimate goal is to lead China from an undeveloped state to an advanced global power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And with the later post-Mao stage, all the resistances, the anxieties and uncertainty, as well as openness and possibilities, are also excised by the sweeping power of capital. The Chinese experience in the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Mao’s socialist experiment, thus serves only as one of the various ways of capitalist accumulation, one of the “multilinear” paths of “modernization,” one of the many “local instantiations” of global capitalism.

However, I have already argued Marx had imagined and could imagine AMP as an alternative that stands opposed to state and capital. Then, could we imagine another way to think about the “commune”? It seems to me that the four discourses sketched above all tend to erase its alterity and incorporate the peculiar existence of “agrarian commune” and “Asiatic Mode of Production” in their own discursive construction. Firstly, socialist states, obsessed with the goal of building a strong state and rapid

modernization – an exigency demanded by the encroaching imperialist powers – banned the discussion of AMP in order to suppress Marx’s criticism of a powerful state implicated in the discourse of AMP. Area studies in North America and post-80s China, under the influence of Weberianized “modernization,” tried to eliminate the alterity of socialism in the AMP by constructing a unilinear history of “modernization” (capitalist modernization) and describing socialism as regressive restoration of despotism. The cultural nationalist appropriation of AMP which treats AMP as a distinct national character and boasts of China’s long imperial tradition reduces the alterity of AMP into cultural difference, which only reinforces and validates the global capitalism. And finally, the recent re-evaluation of agrarian commune and Mao’s socialism in terms of their positive role of capital accumulation capital, has turned AMP into another narrative of “modernization,” and its counterpart, the Marxist political economists, has also subjected it to the “universal law” of capitalist economics by their economic determinism. To some extent, all of these discourses have more or less reintegrated the AMP into the unilinear historical path of capital or state.

### ***The “Outside”, or, the Positionality of Asiatic Mode of Production***

Here I try to reconsider the representation of commune in another way, that is, from position to positionality. If we use Naoki Sakai’s concepts of “position” and “positionality,” then we may say these discourses all try to fix or to ossify the AMP in certain power configurations – the totalitarian state, modernization, state capitalism, or cultural nationalism – in which it occupies an assigned “position” that functionally

serves the logic of state or capital. “Position” is fixed in a given power configuration, where “one’s conduct is regulated by the expectations and imperatives” of the given situation; thus “position” is “objectively determined, and its rules of conduct cannot be changed at whim. The configuration of positions is a social reality that serves as the basis for consensus among participants on the stage.” On the stage, “when a performative utterance is made, the elements of the situation are given in such a way that its consequences are known in advance; its effect is codified.”<sup>99</sup> Likewise, under all these discursive elaborations of commune or AMP, the energy, anxiety and uncertainty around the empirical and representational existence of commune is defused.

In contrast, “positionality” for Sakai always captures an eventual moment. It transcends the given stage of power configuration; it “withdraws from the configuration of positions, being indifferent to them all.” Positionality is being “off-stage” and “cannot be treated as being within the configuration.”<sup>100</sup> Sakai points out, a statement’s positionality, the speaker’s transcendence of a particular stage, is the essential condition for modern production of knowledge, which endows it with a certain universality. In this study, I will try to articulate the same positionalities of my writers in each particular stage of history. Of course, it does not mean the speakers or writers could be truly free of power relations; he or she has always “articulated to power configurations”. But he/she can also conceal his/her specific relation to power configuration, distancing himself/herself away from the power configuration he/she describes, therefore, to expose a positionality, to witness an untranslatable moment.

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<sup>99</sup> Sakai, “Positions and Positionalities: After Two Decades,” 70-71.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 71

Indeed, to expose a positionality is simultaneously to hide his positionality, the “capturing” or “naming” moment, and therefore to make the power configurations look natural and universal. Hence, we can see, all these above-mentioned ossified discourses assume a certain positionality and try to capture and objectify AMP by assigning to it a certain position in the power configuration of their discourse.

The result is, with the “capturing” of the AMP, the discourses eliminate its otherness. As Foucault says, thought, or discourse, always tends to eliminate otherness by interiorizing it, by incorporating it into itself in a dialectic way. “Any purely reflexive discourse runs the risk of leading the experience of the outside back to the dimension of interiority; reflection tends irresistibly to repatriate it to the side of consciousness and to develop it into a description of living that depicts the ‘outside’ as the experience of the body, space, the limits of the will, and the ineffaceable presence of the other.”<sup>101</sup> Therefore, Foucault points out, the entire tradition of Western thoughts/philosophy hardly sees any “thought from the outside.” “For the entire time the demand was being formulated, most imperiously, to interiorize the world, to erase alienation, to move beyond the false moment of the *Entausserung*, to humanize nature, to naturalize man, and to recover earth the treasures that had been spent in heaven.”<sup>102</sup>

Now, I hope to retrieve to the moment of “capturing” with a sophisticated reading of literary text. While discourse or thought is a systematic order that tries to interiorize everything and eliminate their “otherness,” language and literature can always create an opening and “undo” the system of meaning, as “a passage to the

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<sup>101</sup> Michel Foucault, *Foucault/Blanchot*, trans. Brian Massumi and Jeffrey Mehlman (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 21.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

‘outside.’”<sup>103</sup> This is because language, in its dissemination, undermines the sovereignty of subject. “Language endlessly spreads forth, while the subject – the ‘I’ who speaks - fragments, disperses, scatters, disappearing in that naked space.”<sup>104</sup> “The subject that speaks is less the responsible agent of a discourse (what holds it, what uses it to assert and judge, what sometimes represents itself in it by means of a grammatical form designed to have that effect) than a non-existence in whose emptiness the unending outpouring of language uninterruptedly continues.”<sup>105</sup> Thought/discourse and literature/fiction/language are two entirely different modes of existence. “‘I speak’ runs counter to ‘I think.’” “‘I think’ led to the indubitable certainty of the ‘I’ and its existence; ‘I speak’, on the other hand, distances, disperses, effaces that existence and lets only its empty emplacement appear.” While “thought leads us to the deepest interiority”, “speech about speech, by way of literature as well as perhaps by other paths, to the outside in which the speaking subject disappears.”<sup>106</sup> “Language escapes the mode of being of discourse – in other words the dynasty of representation – and literary speech develops from itself, forming a network in which each point is distinct, distant from even its closest neighbors, and has a position in relation to every other point in a space that simultaneously holds and separates them all.”<sup>107</sup>

Therefore, according to Foucault, instead of trying to build up a system of meanings like discourse, language hollows out the meaning system, breaking its

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 12



coherency, and unveiling the void surrounding things and people. The language of fiction “must be directed not toward any inner confirmation – not toward a kind of central, unshakable certitude – but toward an outer bound where it must continually contest itself.”<sup>108</sup> Foucault argues, Maurice Blanchot’s novel writing forms a singular mode of being of discourse, “appearing with no conclusion and no image, with no truth and no theater, with no proof, no mask, no affirmation, free of any center, unfettered to any native soil; a discourse that constitutes its own space as the outside toward which, and outside of which, it speaks.” Such novel “returns thought to the outside.”<sup>109</sup>

For our purpose, Foucault’s conceptualization of language and literature helps us reflect about Rebecca Karl’s dismissing of literary texts as irrelevant fantasy and prioritizing of empirical historical studies as the sole source of authenticity. Although my study has been inspired a lot by her and other Marxist political economists’ theory of “outside,” I also want to challenge its economic determinism and reconfigure the “outside” as a Foucaultian outside. Foucault shows us that literature in fact contains the potential of breaking away from the coherent discourses that try to capture, fix, and interiorize AMP in their meaning system, erasing its alterity. The ruptures, interstices, and void hidden inside the text would always exceed the systematic control of the discourse. In other words, literature may become a source of historicity, through which we may glimpse the true alterity of AMP.

I want to capture the moment of “truth telling”; it does not mean a universal truth, but a truth only in its historicity. Indeed, that literature may contain a certain

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 21

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 24-25

truthfulness, an act of “truth telling” like “testimony,” is also pointed out by Derrida. While it is common to think that there is a strict line between testimony and literature, in that testimony is based on truth and fact, and literature is fictional and distanced from reality, however, in his reading of Blanchot’s autobiographical fiction *The Instant of My Death*, Derrida demonstrates that the line between the two is indeed very tenuous, because both testimony and literature involves the undecidability of whether what it tells is truth or not.

For one thing, testimony contains literature, as it is always inherently structured by the possibility of perjury, lie, and fiction in it, without which it will lose its value of truthfulness:

There is no testimony that does not structurally imply in itself the possibility of fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lie, and perjury – that is to say, the possibility of literature, of the innocent or perverse literature that innocently plays at perverting all of these distinctions. If this possibility that it seems to prohibit were effectively excluded, if testimony thereby became proof, information, certainty, or archive, it would lose its function as testimony. In order to remain testimony, it must therefore allow itself to be haunted. It must allow itself to be parasitized by precisely what it excludes from its inner depths, the possibility, at least, of literature.<sup>110</sup>

On the other hand, literature is like testimony. Despite that literary institution defines that literature is meant to be “fictional” and distanced from “reality,” it is always possible that literature contains certain truthfulness of experience “in the abundance life.” Life here means a free will which tries to get rid of the established institution. The moment of truth-telling or the moment of positionality among positions. “The literary institution ... has imposed the rigor of its right to calculate, master,

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<sup>110</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 29-30.

neutralize this undecidability, to make as if ... literature, in its possibility, had not begun before literature, in the very abundance of life. But it nonetheless remains.” The literary institution cannot exclude from fiction “the exigency of truthfulness, sincerity, or objectivity.”<sup>111</sup>

This is what I want to cope with the “commune” in a few literary texts. It means I want to capture the undecidability. To the extent that the author writes about “experience of the unexperienced,” to the extent that he records his singular and irreplaceable experience, literature is like testimony. Derrida says, the narrative “testifies to what happened only once, dated, occurred, arrived, even if it did not arrive, at a date and in a place that are irreplaceable, to someone who is, in short, the only one able to testify to it, even if he inscribes his attestation in a network of facts largely if not totally probable, public, accessible to proof.”<sup>112</sup> Here for Derrida, Blanchot’s autobiographical fiction presents an exemplary case in which the distinction between testimony and fiction is contested. In his writing, testimony and literature fall in the singular place of “neuter”, “the neither-nor that is beyond all dialectic,”<sup>113</sup> and “beyond the distinction between the real and the phantasmatic.”<sup>114</sup> We cannot know for sure whether what the writer writes about is true or not, just like we cannot know for sure whether the testimony is telling truth or not. It is precisely in this “undecidability,” in literature as well as in testimony, that it is most likely to contain the truth. “One must be able to say this just as firmly, that this undecidability, like the abyssal co-implications it engenders, does not in the least invalidate the exigency of

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 93.

truthfulness, sincerity, or objectivity, any more than it authorizes a confusion between good faith and false testimony.”<sup>115</sup>

Such is the truth I try to capture in the following discussions. Literature is the truth, even when the writer writes about its singular and irreplaceable experience, his text is easily extracted from its original context of enunciation and crafted onto other contexts, just like the AMP is crafted onto various discourses and serves for different arguments. Therefore, the truthfulness lies only in the instant of their enunciation. “It is thus the very instance of the instant that seems to become exemplary: exemplary in the very place where it seems unique and irreplaceable, under the seal of unicity.”<sup>116</sup> Hence, the “truth” of literature must be sought from the instant of its writing, from the historicity of the text, which requires us to historicize the text. In doing so, the historicity of AMP, which has been erased by the various discourse for their own purposes, might be recovered through investigating into historicity of relevant texts on agrarian commune at various moments of its inscription in Chinese history.

### ***Agrarian Communes in People’s Republic of China: An Outline***

I try to list three of these truth-telling moments corresponding to three different periods of People’s Republic of China, when agrarian commune had taken different forms through different periods in accordance with the varying needs of the national economy.

Chapter One will focus on the specific form of “socialist agrarian commune” and its literary representations, especially Zhao Shuli’s *Sanliwan Village* (sanliwan, 三

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 42

里湾) (1955) and Liu Qing's *The Builders* (chuangyeshi, 创业史) (1958). While cooperation in agricultural work had long existed before the founding of People's Republic China, in the form of mutual-aid group, agricultural collectivization was officially promoted as a national movement in 1953 together with the launching of industrialization project known as the the first "Five Year Plan" (1953-1958), giving rise to the initial form of commune – elementary cooperative (初级社, chujishe) – nationwide. Later, it expended its scale and developed into "advanced cooperative" (高级社, gaojishe), and culminated in the form of "People's Commune" in 1958 and lasted through Cultural Revolution. This socialist agrarian commune, resembling the "clan" (the first type) that Marx had praised, was highly organized with collective labor and collective property with the least degree of individuation. Perhaps we can say, during this period, agrarian commune indeed functioned to provide surplus to the state for accumulation. However, I will try to present, the form of "agrarian commune," as independent and self-sustaining economic unit capable of producing its own surplus, infused by the socialist ethics of democracy and egalitarianism, also has the potential of escaping the logic of the state and capital, spontaneously developing into alternative form of social organization. Such discrepancy between the state-assigned function of accumulation and its actual character can be glimpsed through Zhao Shuli's and Liu Qing's novels on collectivization. Zhao pictured agrarian commune not from the view of "modernization," but from the perspective of local peasantry. Cooperative and commune, in this light, appeared more as an indigenous tradition that suited to the needs of peasantry and not necessarily subject to the logic of accumulation. Zhao's novel shows a differential understanding of "individual,"

“family,” “romantic love,” “marriage” rooted in a rural society, which differs from the bourgeois definition, and hence opens for us an alternative temporality. Liu Qing is more easily to be recognized as a “modern” novelist, who viewed collectivization from the perspective of “modernization” and “industrialization”; however, his novel *The Builders* also unconsciously revealed somewhat ambiguous attitude in his depiction of the relationship of local community and state. And this makes the “builders” in his novel not exactly the builder of a capitalist(socialist) cooperation but indicates something more.

Chapter Two targets the post-socialist moment of the “great transformation.” After Cultural Revolution, as China carried out the economic reform and turned toward market economy, People’s Commune was abolished, and the agrarian commune changed into the form of “household contract responsibility system.” Under this new organization, there was no more collective labor, but collective land nevertheless remained. Each household was allotted an equal share of land, and agricultural work was contracted and individualized to each household, while the collective property, such as animals and machines, were also divided. Nevertheless, land, as the primary means of production, remained a collective property at the disposal of the village community, and the possession of land is mediated by peasant’s affiliation with the commune. To this extent, it is still a type of “commune,” only more loosely organized, like the “Germanic type,” or what Rosa Luxemburg referred to as “primitive communism.” It actually gave rise to a vast strata of small peasants (each possessing a plot of land), which, under the conditions of market economy, have turned into migrant laborers, constituting a huge army of flexible and disposable labor

force that suited to the need of global capitalism. Meanwhile, the peasant family was structurally and internally fractured, divided between the “non-capitalist” countryside and the “capitalist” city, to the point that family is now facing the crisis of disintegration and may lose its designated function of reproducing labor, for which I will explore the works of so-called “Underclass Literature” (底层文学, diceng wenxue) rising at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. I select out Fang Fang’s (方方) *Tu Ziqiang’s Personal Sorrow* (涂自强的个人悲伤), Chen Yingsong’s (陈应松) *Mother* (母亲) and *Wild Cat Lake* (野猫湖) to illustrate the social contradiction and its literary representation about the “great transformation” towards capitalism. We will see how these bodily embodiments of “commune” did not completely conform to the logic of capital. On one side, the possession of land in the countryside ensured means of self-sustenance for migrant laborers, which enabled them to dissociate themselves from capital without starving to death. On the other side, the migrants show the wild power and resentment of the downtrodden subaltern class.

In this sense, the “great transformation” is far from completion. Indeed, in recent years, we can even find a reverse tendency. Because of the preservation of commune in the remote countryside, the migrants have a place to return. What kind of countryside is waiting for them? And can they really reside permanently in the countryside? Can we resuscitate agriculture and reconstruct the countryside with the attempts of re-collectivization? These are questions which I attempt to approach in Chapter Three. Since the land remains collective property of the village community, there have been various attempts that try to reactivate the socialist legacy of collective labor in a productive way, in social practice, economic policy, as well as in literary

imagination. In this chapter I will discuss two literary texts. The first one is Wang Anyi's (王安忆) novel *Anonymous* (Niming, 匿名) (2016), which presents us the utopian imagination of how the remote countryside and small towns that are "delinked" from the capitalist city become the enclaves where the humanity thrives and flourishes, and how an egalitarian community gets to be formed between the disabled, the "unproductive," and "useless" humans that are not qualified as "labor force." The second is Liu Jiming's (刘继明) *Human World* (Renjing, 人境) (2016). In a way that echoes Liu Qing's *The Builders*, this novel shows how youngsters that suffer setbacks in the city finds a new way of life in their cooperative effort of founding and running professional agricultural cooperative.



## CHAPTER 1

### THE COMMON IN SOCIALIST LITERATURE ON COLLECTIVIZATION

Upon the completion of land reform in 1940s, each peasant was entitled to a share of land sufficient to support himself by laboring on the land. However, such mode of production of small peasant economy was incompatible with the condition of modern state, which requires socialized mechanized production. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx has offered an elaborate analysis as to how the originally “liberation” of peasantry from feudal villenage into small holders turned out to be the “enslavement” and “pauperization” of peasantry under the condition of capitalism.

The small holding of the peasant is now only the pretext that allows the capitalist to draw profits, interest and rent from the soil, while leaving it to the tiller of the soil himself to see how he can extract his wages. ...The mortgage debt burdening the soil of France imposes on the French peasantry payment of an amount of interest equal to the annual interest on the entire British national debt. Small-holding property, in this enslavement by capital to which its development inevitably pushes forward, has transformed the mass of the French nation into troglodytes. Sixteen million peasants (including women and children) dwell in hovels, a large number of which have but one opening, others only two and the most favoured three.<sup>117</sup>

As capitalist relations developed, land was turned into the source of the interests, rents, and profits of capitalism, the low productivity of small holdings forced upon small holders the heavy burden of both the state and capitalism - they not only could not afford capital's demand of extracting surplus value, but also could not afford the

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<sup>117</sup> Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”, in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 481.

taxes for supporting the bureaucracy of the modern state. As a result, agriculture inevitably deteriorated under capitalism and small holders were dragged into the state of misery and destitution, subject to the to the exploitation of capital.

Under the modern condition, socialized production is necessary for any modern state, be it socialist state or capitalist state; “the transformation of the individualized and scattered means of production into socially concentrated means of production” is necessary. To enhance production and develop economy, small-holder ownership must be eliminated, and small lots of lands must be amassed to conduct large-scale mechanical farming. In socialist states, the socialized production took the form of “collectivization.” Soviet Union nationalized all land and established state farms and collective farms to conduct large-scale mechanized collective farming. China, too, launched the campaign of “socialist transformation of agriculture, handicrafts and capitalist industry and commerce” in 1953 along with its “Five-Year Plan” of industrialization. However, contrary to Marx’s proposal that socialist state should stop extracting surplus product from peasants like capitalist states and help peasants develop, in most socialist states, collectivization ended up a means of extracting surplus value from the countryside for the state’s accumulation.

Many scholars have noted the “exploitative” nature of of agricultural cooperative in the state-dominated “modernization.” Philip Kuhn poignantly points out that collectivization functioned as a “powerful extraction device” for the modern Chinese state to “access to the farmers’ surplus production, unimpeded by predatory or protective middlemen.”<sup>118</sup> The “unified purchase” in 1953, he says, dealt a blow

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<sup>118</sup> Philip Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 102.

against middlemen and abolished the private market in agricultural products, and enabled the state to squeeze its revenue from the farmers through the mandated low purchase price. Kuhn says, “The administrative effect of land reform and collectivization was, in simplest terms, a deeper state penetration into village society and a more rigorous system of extraction from it.”<sup>119</sup> To this extent, Mao’s socialism is more radical than Nationalist regime and the late Qing regime in carrying out the agenda of building a modern state.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri also criticize that “modernization” in socialist states such as Soviet, China, and Cuba were “perversely repeating the figures and structures of power in the capitalist states they oppose.”<sup>120</sup> To the extent that socialist and capitalist states both sought to deprive agricultural producers of their land rights as property, and to the extent that land in these countries was consolidated into large holdings controlled either by national government or foreign corporations, “the great moment of modernization in both its socialist and capitalist forms has been one of great convergence.”<sup>121</sup> The common result wrought by the socialist and capitalist modernizations is the disappearance of peasantry as an economic class.<sup>122</sup>

Their accusation of socialist modernization was not unfounded. Many official documents at that time have confirmed the utilitarian purpose of using agrarian commune for accumulating funds for the state. Mao Zedong explicitly stated that “large funds are needed to accomplish both national industrialization and the technical

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>120</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 90.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 117-118.

transformation of agriculture,” and “a considerable part of these funds has to be accumulated through agriculture.” “Apart from the direct agricultural tax, this is done by developing light industry to produce the great quantities of consumer goods needed by the peasants and exchanging them for the peasants’ commodity grain and the raw materials for light industry, so that the material requirements of both the peasants and the state are met and funds are accumulated for the state.”<sup>123</sup> For this reason, Mao Zedong regarded agriculture as no less important than industry: “We must on no account regard industry and agriculture, socialist industrialization and the socialist transformation of agriculture as disconnected or isolated things, and on no account must we emphasize the one and play down the other.”<sup>124</sup> Such was Mao’s theory of “walking on two legs” and “simultaneous development of industry and agriculture.”<sup>125</sup> “Agriculture has vital bearing on the nation’s economy and the people’s livelihood,” therefore, “in a sense agriculture is itself industry.”<sup>126</sup>

Particularly, a distinct feature of Mao’s collectivization was that it relied primarily on peasants’ own labor power rather than the state’s financial support or industry’s capital investment to achieve collectivization and modernization of the rural area. In 1956, “the Program of National Agricultural Development from 1956 to 1967” (also known as the “Forty Rural Doctrines”) came out. Its main idea was “to mobilize the human power, material power, and financial power of five hundred million peasants” to achieve the objectives of modernization of the rural area,

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<sup>123</sup> Mao Zedong, “On the Co-operative Transformation of Agriculture,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Volume 5* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1977), 197.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Mao Zedong, “Talks at a Conference of Secretaries of Provincial, Municipal and Autonomous Region Party Committees,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, vol. 5*, 380.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 381.

including raising production, planting forests, developing husbandry, developing hygiene and medical conditions of rural area, improving living conditions of rural population and absorbing unemployed urban population, etc. It was impossible, the Program said, to rely on state's investment on everything, which would exceed the state's financial power and would result in the postponing and even cancellation of these projects. Rather, we should rely on the huge amount of human labor of the peasants to accomplish this.<sup>127</sup>

According to Wen Tiejun, such a strategy of using intensive input of human labor power in place of capital input to generate surplus, actually corresponds to the economic formula of L (labor) turning into K (capital). And such heavy exploitation of human labor power was aggravated in 1958-1960 when China faced a extreme lack of capital due to the considerable decrease of Soviet's financial aid.<sup>128</sup> In this light, agricultural collectivization, indeed served as an efficient means of primitive accumulation for the state; by organizing peasants' individual labor into collective labor, it effectively raised the productivity and increased the output of grains. To this extent, it can be seen a economic exploitation of peasantry, a kind of "state slavery" under the mode of Asiatic Mode of Production.

However, we should not reduce "collectivization" and "agrarian commune" to mere instrumental means for the state's primitive accumulation. For one thing, "collectivization" is a modern political practice, which relies on the political agency of

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<sup>127</sup> Liao Luyan, "Guanyu yijiuwuliu nian dao yijiuliuqi nian quanguo nongye fazhan gangyao de shuoming" 关于 1956 年到 1967 年全国农业发展纲要的说明 ("Explanation about the Program of National Agricultural Development from 1956 to 1967"), in *Nongye jitihua zhongyao wenjian huibian* 农业集体化重要文件汇编 (*Collection of Important Documents on Agricultural Collectivization, 1949-1957*) ed. Huang Daoxia, Yu Zhan, Wang Xiyu (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1992), 778.

<sup>128</sup> Wen, *Baci Weiji*, 54.

modern subject. Because of the indeterminacy that is constitutive of modern subjectivity, any political movement cannot be simply regarded as an order imposed from above, but must always involve the consensus of the subjects, not without resistance. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out, the disciplinary regimes of capitalism and state, in their attempt to produce subjects and provide labor power to capital, always encounter “the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom.”<sup>129</sup> Because “the power relation of modernity can be exercised only over free subjects who express that freedom through resistance to hierarchy and domination”<sup>130</sup>, therefore, there is always resistance of modernity within the modernity, that is, there is always the element “anti-modernity” within the modernity.

Noting the complexity and heterogeneity of Chinese socialist history, Wang Hui describes Mao’s project of socialist modernization as “anti-modern theory of modernization.” He points out that while the socialist state contained within itself oppressive elements – the hierarchical bureaucracy, unequal exchanges between the country and the city, exploitative mechanism of extracting surplus value in support of the modern military defense system and modern industry – which were the inevitable products of modernization that can be found in any modern state, there were, however, at the same time critical forces within the socialist state which resisted the oppressive force of modernity. “In China’s historical context, the struggle of modernization and the rejection of rationalization have proceeded together, something that has produced profound historical contradictions.” Hence, Chinese socialism was full of internal

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<sup>129</sup> Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 59.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

tensions and contradictions. For example, while Mao established the modern state through centralization, he destroyed the centralized bureaucratic system with the “Cultural Revolution”; while he used the communization and collectivization to foster economic development, he used the socialist distributive system to reduce the economic and social inequality; while he mobilized the whole society into the project of modernization of the state, and even deprived individuals of political rights and autonomy, on the other hand he detested oppression of popular sovereignty by the state machine.<sup>131</sup>

For this reason, we should cease to treat “collectivization” as a mere state-dominating modernization project imposed from above, but should see it as a process full of negotiations and resistances of modern subjectivity, and pay attention to the inner complexity of the “collectivization.” What were the “modern” and “premodern” elements of the agricultural commune? How should the premodern ethical and cultural world of peasants participate in the modern organization of agricultural commune? Socialist literature on collectivization offers a productive place to capture such complexity and resistances within socialist history.

Revolutionary struggles and production activities of workers and peasants have always been the central themes of communist literature. Ever since Chinese Communist Party tried to use literature as a medium to educate and transform the illiterate masses, there have been many communist literary works that depicted the changes and social movements happening in rural areas throughout 1940s and 1970s,

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<sup>131</sup> Wang Hui, “Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity,” in *China’s New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition*, ed. Theodore Hutters (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 150-151.

some of them popular and influential, such as Ding Ling's *The Sun Shines Over the Sanggan River* (Taiyang zhaozai Sangganhe shang, 太阳照在桑干河上) (1948), Zhou Libo's *The Hurricane* (Baofeng zhouyu, 暴风骤雨) (1948), *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* (Shanxiang jubian, 山乡巨变) (1958), Liu Qing's *The Builders* (Chuangyeshi, 创业史) (1960), Zhao Shuli's *Sanliwan Village* (Sanliwan, 三里湾) (1955), Hao Ran's *Sunny Days* (Yanyangtian, 艳阳天) (1962-1965) and *Golden Avenue* (Jinguang dadao, 金光大道) (1975-1977), etc.

In this chapter, I will select two pieces of works for my discussion of the agrarian commune, Zhao Shuli's *Sanliwan Village* (Sanliwan, 三里湾) (1955), and Liu Qing's *The Builders* (Chuangyeshi, 创业史) (1960), the two most popular and highly-esteemed novels on collectivization and agrarian commune in socialist period with high artistic quality. Although agricultural collectivization was a state-promoted modernization project, and communist literature often served the propaganda of collectivization campaign, however, literature is far more complex than pure political propaganda; like Derrida says, it will reveal certain "truth" like a testimony, to the extent that the author records his singular and irreplaceable experience. The fiction "testifies to what happened only once, dated, occurred, arrived, even if it did not arrive, at a date and in a place that are irreplaceable, to someone who is, in short, the only one able to testify to it, even if he inscribes his attestation in a network of facts largely if not totally probable, public, accessible to proof."<sup>132</sup> Thus, Zhao Shuli and Liu Qing's fictional works could be treated as two testimonies of how they felt about the

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<sup>132</sup> Derrida, *Demeure*, 93.



agricultural collectivization at a certain historical moment as two singular individuals at different positions, and thus presented different perspectives. While Zhao Shuli, a peasant-born writer deeply immersed in and identified with peasant culture, viewed the agrarian commune from the indigenous perspective of peasantry, treating it as something that naturally grew out of the rural society, Liu Qing, an intellectual writer with a passion for modernization, treated “agrarian commune” as an utterly “modern” product and placed it within the context of China’s modernization and industrialization. Both of their works have unveiled the intricate relationship of commune and socialist state that cannot be flattened by the logic of capital.

### ***Zhao Shuli’s Sanliwan Village: “Indigenous” Commune in Rural Society***

Zhao Shuli is a communist writer of high reputation while at the same time aroused controversies. Because of his close relation with the “peasant culture” and “peasant perspective,” he experienced different treatments in different periods. In 1940s, when the Communist Party just began to ally with the peasant masses and sought to establish its legitimacy among peasantry, Zhao’s familiarity with peasant culture was highly promoted by Communist Party; his works were promoted by Communist Party as “models” that embodied the spirit of Mao Zedong’s *Talk at the Yen’an Forum on Literature and Arts* (1942),<sup>133</sup> which had done a very good job in serving the illiterate masses by using accessible language, plain style, and writing on

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<sup>133</sup> Mao’s *Talk at Yan’an Forum on Literature and Arts* Forum was a defining event that fundamentally reshaped the Chinese literature. Before, modern Chinese literature mainly received influence from May Fourth Literature as model, and modern literary works were limited mainly to the circle of literate classes such as students, urban civilians, and intellectuals, or, in other words, the elite classes. Mao’s talk for the first time raised the issue that literature and arts should also face the illiterate masses such as soldiers, workers, and peasants by adopting a plain language and style that they could easily understand. Mao’s talk marked a fundamental turn from the “elite” May Fourth literature to the “mass” literature.

themes that are familiar to people's life. But when socialist state was founded and modernization was carried out, his "peasant" perspectives sometimes resulted in his conflicts with the demands of the Party and the state. This was because, the mode of existence of "peasant" itself was in conflict with the modern socialized production. As He Guimei points out, the controversial position of Zhao Shuli precisely illustrates the "excess" of peasant culture which cannot be easily subsumed by the given framework of "modern literature" defined by bourgeois culture, or the "modernization" project of the socialist state. Hence, Zhao's literature may actually provide an alternative imaginary of the modern.<sup>134</sup>

Zhao Shuli grew up in a declining peasant family. His grandfather, a small business man, emptied his savings to buy a few acres of land in the countryside and became a small landlord, but with the deterioration of economy in the countryside, the family had been going down the hill since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>135</sup> When Zhao was a child, the expenses on grandfather's illness and funeral, as well as Zhao Shuli's expenses on school, dragged the family into usury and tons of debts. For this reason, Zhao had a very good understanding of peasants' misery in the countryside. Spending his childhood working in the fields with his father, Zhao was brought up like a peasant and was well-versed in farm work. Nevertheless, Zhao's family managed to support him through school. He went to Changzhi No.4 Normal School, where he received modern education and came into contact with May Fourth literature like most Chinese intellectuals, and wrote a few pieces with the modern language of May Fourth

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<sup>134</sup> He Guimei, *Zhao Shuli yu Xiangtu Zhongguo Xiandaixing* 赵树理与乡土中国现代性 (Zhao Shuli and Modernity of Rural China) (Taiyuan: Beiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2016), 50.

<sup>135</sup> Dai Guangzhong, *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan* 赵树理评传 (Biography of Zhao Shuli) (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2013), 3-4.

literature. However, he found that modern Chinese literature could barely get to peasants. The modern Chinese language used by May Fourth literature was a re-invented Europeanized language in terms of grammatical structure and semantic, and such Europeanized written language was alienated from the peasants. When he tried to read a piece of May Fourth fiction to his father, he was surprised to find that his father showed no interest in it at all. Instead he found that peasants showed far greater interest in the old-style folklores, ballads, and theatre, which were regrettably informed by the old “feudalist” ideology of the landlord class. He realized, as long as peasants were still immersed in literature and art with “feudal” consciousness, there was no way they could accept new and revolutionary ideas. For this reason, Zhao consciously departed from the May Fourth literary tradition. He decided, in order to educate peasants and transform their thoughts, he would have to use a style that is accessible to them and popular with them. He called May Fourth literature “literature on the podium” (wéntán wénxué, 文坛文学), meaning such literature is placed high above the masses and circulated within only a small circle of intellectual elites, while he aimed for his literature to be “vendor’s literature” (wéntān wénxué, 文摊文学), meaning that he intended his literature to be stories sold on vendor’s stall, which peasants liked to read and could afford.<sup>136</sup>

Zhao Shuli made it clear that his literature was intended for the peasants; the guiding principle in his choosing of language was to make peasants understand, and he hoped to write fictions in such a way that those who had read his story could retell the

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<sup>136</sup> Li Pu, “Zhao Shuli yinxiangji” 赵树理印象记 (Impressions of Zhao Shuli), in *Zhao Shuli Yanjiu Ziliao* 赵树理研究资料 (*Research Materials of Zhao Shuli*), ed. Huang Xiuji (Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2010), 15.

story to peasants who couldn't read. In other words, he intended his literature to be a kind of "story-telling". Such conceptualization of his literature, intended for the less educated peasants, has determined his unique language and style. He avoided using long and Europeanized sentence characteristic of May Fourth literature, but instead used the plain language that people would use in their daily conversation. Deeply nourished by and immersed in peasant culture and folk culture, he consciously drew on the cultural resources for his literary creation. Knowing that peasants would lose interest in listening if they could not figure out what happens in the first few lines, he always made sure that information that "person, place, time" is demonstrated at the beginning of the story. For this reason, he prioritizes "plot" over "character," prioritizes "narration" over "description," avoiding any lengthy and winding description of characters or scene that are not directly related to the plot itself. He said: "peasant readers are not used to reading separate descriptions; if you spend a few pages writing about natural scenes, they would think you are writing a book of geography."<sup>137</sup> The lack of "in-depth" psychological depiction of character makes Zhao Shuli's works create such an impression as if there was no "modern subjectivity" in the peasant's world that Zhao Shuli depicts.

This character distinguished Zhao Shuli's works from modern Western novels and most May Fourth literature founded on the interiority of modern subject, and made them more close to a kind of medieval "story telling." This has confused readers who have been accustomed to modern novels, such as American journalist Jack Belden, who expressed his disappointment as such:

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<sup>137</sup> Zhao Shuli, "Zuo shenghuo de zhuren" 做生活的主人 (Be the master of your life), in *Zhao Shuli Yanjiu Ziliao*, 127-128.

The plots were merely outlines, the characters often bare types labeled with a name, but possessing no personality, and none of them were fully developed. Worst of all, his stories dealt with outlined events and not with actually felt emotions. Those deep passions which I found out from personal experience were stirring the whole Chinese countryside found no record in his pages.<sup>138</sup>

Belden's confusion by the lack of "emotions," "personality," and "deep passions" in Zhao Shuli's works, revealed the fundamental conflict of Zhao's works with modern Western novels: the absence of "interiority."

Sunouchi Tōru (洲之内彻), too, is confused by the absence of "inner struggle" of Zhao's characters. He said, psychologism, though having various shortcomings that undermine modern novels, is indispensable and even inevitable for the establishing of the modern self; however, this basic method of modern novels is absent in Zhao's novels. He is also confused by the fact that in Zhao Shuli's fictional world there is no conflict between individual and the society, which is supposed to be the central concern of modern individuals. He said, Zhao Shuli's characters do not even engage in battles against the social authority; the new government and new law descend like a savior overnight and the road simply opens up before their eyes. They are blessed simply because they are on the right side of history, on the side of progressive force, for their correct standing.<sup>139</sup> For Sunouchi, the "inner struggle," the "conflict between individual and society," is what defines a modern subject. For this reason, there seems no modern subject in Zhao's novels; peasants seem to present a "premodern" outlook, as if they haven't got rid of the traditional rural world.

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<sup>138</sup> Jack Belden, *China Shakes the World* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 96.

<sup>139</sup> Sunouchi Tōru, "Features of Zhao Shuli's literature," trans. Wang Baoxiang, in *Zhao Shuli Yanjiu Ziliao*, 405-406.

However, Takeuchi Yoshimi gives a different explanation for Zhao's fiction's "premodern" outlook. The seemingly traditional outlook of Zhao's works in fact conceals a utterly new conception – transcending the bourgeois "modernist" literature by returning to the "medieval literature," in which the relationship of the writer and readers is not yet differentiated. He notes that in Zhao's fictions, rather than the opposition between individual and the background, character has a tendency of becoming the ground – once a character is fully developed and the "type" is complete, this character then merges into the background, giving way to another individual character's development. In creating the "type", Zhao "returns" it to the will of the entirety; the particular/individual is neither against the entirety/totality, nor is it a part of it, but rather, individual exists in such a state that "individual is the entirety." Individual, staying the way as it is, merges into the entirety. However, the individual is not "unchanged." After going through the time and struggles in life, it "returns," but to a higher departing point than the original, and in doing so, the entirety develops with the individual together; as such, the world develops together in entirety. As such, the world itself is constantly drifting, without an anchoring point or a set framework as most modern literature do. Such a "drifting" world is a world that has unlimited space for individual's free development without restraint or limit, and displays the scenario of a true "freedom" of individual.<sup>140</sup>

Takeuchi's insightful reading of the "individual" and the "entirety" in Zhao Shuli's fictional world is highly suggestive of the relationship of "individual" and the "collective." As we will later discuss, in the novel *Sanliwan Village*, there is not an

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<sup>140</sup> Takeuchi Yoshimi, "The 'Newness' of Zhao Shuli's Literature," trans. Xiao Hao, in *Zhao Shuli Yanjiu Ziliao*, 429-430.

“unchanging inner core” of individual; rather, whether the individual, family, the cooperative, or the village, are all mutually mediated and constantly changing together.

Despite its seemingly and confusing “traditional” outlook, the content of Zhao’s fictions is utterly new with modern ideas. His fictions touched upon romantic love between two free individuals, encourage women to be independent through her own labor rather than rely on husband, to break out of the large patriarchal household, to fight against local landlords and villains, etc. For example, *Xiao Erhei Got Married* (Xiao Erhei jiehun) tells a story about how superstitions prevented free love; *Marriage Registration* (Dengji) was a story written to correspond to the newly promulgated Marriage Law; *Clapper Talk of Li Youcai* was written to serve the rent-reduction struggles during the Second Sino-Japanese War, *Transformations of Village Li* was written for the mobilization for a battle at Shangdang County; *Grain Collector* was inspired by his experience of dealing with lower officials of the old regime; *Heirloom* dealt with the relationship of modern rural woman and traditional mother-in-law. Basically, his fictions served as a medium for the Communist Party’s project of “modernizing” the rural society.

Nevertheless, in introducing these new policies or new ideas, Zhao always viewed it from the perspective of local peasants, putting himself in the position of peasants, considering their possible emotions and reactions, and bring in peasants’ perspectives. Zhao avoids treating the new ideas and new practices as something “alien” and “external” to peasant’s life, brought by the Communist from outside and imposed upon the otherwise “intact” peasant world. To Zhao Shuli, the new values and new practices, corresponding to peasants’ need to solve problems in their reality

which could not be solved otherwise, appear to be something that naturally grow out from the rural society, rather than something imposed from outside by the state regime. For example, the resistance against landlord's expropriation and oppression is the spontaneous and innate need of peasants; in this sense, the land reform and communist revolution led by Communist Party happen to aid peasants in fulfilling their needs of taking back their fruit of labor, and therefore, like Sunouchi describes, "revolution" appears to be a blessed opportunity which opens their road automatically. However, this precisely demonstrates that the "revolution" fuses naturally with the original state of peasant's society. We might say, Zhao tries to create an "indigenous" modernity that grew organically out of body of the rural society.

It is in this sense that Zhao's *Sanliwan Village* (1954) deserves our attention. As his first novel on collectivization, this text can be seen as his systematic attempt to conceptualize this brand new form of "socialist agrarian commune," and provides a lens to see how Zhao conceives of "collectivization" from the local perspective of peasantry and rural society, and especially, how does such "local" and "indigenous" view of cooperation respond to the state's need for accumulation.

It must be noted that when Zhao was writing this novel, "agricultural cooperative" was still a relatively new thing under experiment, practiced locally in Shanxi Province, Zhao's home town, and had not yet become a state policy and national campaign. Shanxi Province was an "old liberated area" (liberated by Communists at the beginning phase of Second Sino-Japanese War) and had a long tradition of mutual aid during the Second Sino-Japanese War. In 1942, due to the extreme lack of means of production (as most animals and grains were taken by



Japanese army), peasants in Shanxi had already developed the form of “mutual aid group”, that is, several households formed a mutual-aid group, sharing animals and tools together to overcome the material difficulty. After land reform was completed and peasants got their own land, new class differentiation began to form within peasantry due to the declining interest in mutual-aid and the room for enhancing productivity capacity through the form of mutual-aid seemed to be very limited. Therefore, Shanxi Province began to experiment with turning the “mutual-aid group” into the “agricultural cooperative” by pooling together and sharing means of production – land, animals, and implements.<sup>141</sup>

At that time, whether such form of “cooperative” should be promoted and whether it counts as “modernization” was still a question under debate. Liu Shaoqi, the party leader in charge of industrialization, taking Soviet as the model of “modernization”, prioritized the development of modern industry in the city over agricultural collectivization, insisting that industrialization should precede agricultural cooperation, and that the essence of “agricultural collectivization” lies in the advanced productive force brought by modern machines, rather than in the simple social cooperation among peasants in the countryside under the backward mode of production:

Agricultural socialism have to rely on industry. Otherwise, no matter how peasants try, it is impossible to make China’s agriculture progress into socialism. ... Only when there is leadership and help from working class, and only when there is state’s industrialization, can we provide peasants

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<sup>141</sup> Zhao Shuli, “Sanliwan xiezuo qianhou” 三里湾写作前后 (Before and After Writing Sanliwan), in *Zhao Shuli Wenji* 赵树理文集, Volume 4 (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1980), 1482.

with lots of machines, and nationalize the land, and then makes possible the collectivization of agriculture.<sup>142</sup>

For this reason, Liu opposed to Shanxi's attempt to raise the productivity through combining land and tools together: "Neither the mutual-aid team nor the co-operative can develop into the collective farm. Collective farm is entirely different, an entirely different form of organization, which can grow neither out of the mutual-aid team nor out of the co-operative."<sup>143</sup>

Mao Zedong, however, disagreed with Liu. After Liu Shaoqi made the comment in July 1951, he drew up "Draft Resolution on Mutual-aid and Cooperation in Agricultural Production" in September 1951 to rebuff Liu Shaoqi,<sup>144</sup> and circulated it within the party in December 1951, attaching his own comments, titled "Take Mutual Aid and Co-operation in Agriculture as a Major Task," calling attention to the importance of mutual-aid and cooperation.<sup>145</sup> On another occasion, when comparing the experience of Soviet Union and China, he again mentioned Liu Shaoqi and implicitly criticized him:

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<sup>142</sup> Liu Shaoqi, "Zai zhongguo gongchandang diyici quanguo xuanchuan gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua" 在中国共产党第一次全国宣传工作会议上的讲话 (Talk at the first national conference of propaganda of Chinese Communist Party), in *Nongye jitihua zhongyao wenjian huibian, 1949-1957* 农业集体化重要文件汇编 1949-1957 (Collection of Important Documents on Agricultural Collectivization, 1949-1957) (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1981).

<sup>143</sup> Liu Shaoqi, "Zenyang duidai tudi gaige hou nongcun de zifa xingshi" (How to deal with spontaneous tendencies in post-land-reform rural area), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian* 建国以来农业合作化史料汇编 (Collected Historical Documents of Agricultural Collectivization since the Founding of People's Republic of China) ed. Huang Daoxia, Yu Zhan, Wang Xiyu (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1992), 43-44.

<sup>144</sup> Mao Zedong, "Zhongyang guanyu nongye shengchan huzhu de jueyi" 中央关于农业生产互助的决议 (Draft Resolution on Mutual-aid and Cooperation in Agricultural Production), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 50-54.

<sup>145</sup> Mao Zedong, "Take Mutual Aid and Co-operation in Agriculture as a Major Task," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Volume 5, 71.

Some comrades disapprove of our Central Committee's policy of keeping the development of agricultural co-operation in step with our socialist industrialization, although the validity of such a policy has been borne out in the Soviet Union. While conceding that the speed of industrialization as set at present is all right, they maintain that agricultural co-operation should proceed at an extremely slow pace and need not keep in step. This is to disregard the experience of the Soviet Union. These comrades fail to understand that socialist industrialization cannot be carried out in isolation from the co-operative transformation of agriculture.<sup>146</sup>

Mao Zedong's central concern was, China's industry, facing the extreme low productivity and extreme shortage of capital, would have to take a long time to produce machines for mechanized farming. Therefore, agricultural cooperation must not wait for the industrialization in the city, but should be carried out simultaneously with industrialization in the city, and supported Shanxi's experiment on agricultural cooperative. In general, Mao supported the experiment of Shanxi Province.

As a writer born of Shanxi origin, Zhao Shuli happened to witness Shanxi's experiment on the new form of organization called "cooperative." In 1951, Zhao had a chance to sit in a conference of the party committee of Changzhi region in Shanxi Province, which decided to tentatively set up ten cooperatives in Changzhi region. Thus, Zhao went to two of the ten villages to learn about this experiment, where he participated in the cooperative's production, distribution, merging, and expansion. After this, he wrote *Sanliwan Village* according to his experience at the Chuandi village (川底村) in Pingshun County (平顺县).<sup>147</sup>

Since the experiment in Shanxi was successful, it was soon approved by the Central Government as a viable form of social organization and promoted nationwide

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<sup>146</sup> Mao Zedong, "On the Co-operative Transformation of Agriculture," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Volume 5, 196.

<sup>147</sup> Zhao, "Sanliwan xiezuo qianhou," 1482.

in 1954. Zhao's novel *Sanliwan* was published in 1955. It was the first novel that wrote about collectivization and published almost at the same time as the nationwide campaign of collectivization. However, we must not take Zhao's novel as a statist propaganda, rather, as we can see, it was written in the experimental phase of the agricultural cooperative, and like all his past writings, it was intended to "solve a problem." To this extent, the novel can be seen as a "testimony" to Zhao's singular experience of attending the experiment of agricultural cooperative and exploring its possibility, recording his way of thinking at a formative moment of agricultural cooperation. While Shanxi was experimenting with the organization of "agricultural cooperative", Zhao was also experimenting in his novel the idea of developing "modernity" in the rural society, which fuse naturally with the traditional village community.

Zhao tends to conceive cooperation as an indigenous tradition that grew from within the rural society rather than a state-led project of "modernization" imposed from outside. In *Sanliwan Village*, the modern economic organization of "agricultural cooperative" seems like something that naturally grows within the rural society itself, and compatible with the innate logic of rural society itself. The state barely had any presence in the novel. The only figure that represents the state is Section Chief Ho, a state cadre that happens to be visiting the cooperative; he is a mere visitor and outsider that has no substantial influence on the decision-making and business of the cooperative. The village community seems to be a self-sufficient life-world relatively independent of the state, running on its own logic, free of the intervention of the state, and all the problems are solved by peasants themselves.

In *Sanliwan Village*, Zhao presents us a type of new village community reinvented through the medium of the agricultural cooperative. The co-operative was not only a modern economic organization for the utilitarian purpose of agricultural production, but also fuses intimately with the existing culture, ethics and justice of the rural life-world. Such cultural and moral logic of rural society was not the old dominant ideology of “Confucianism,” which had been eradicated with the overthrowing of landlords as the ruling class during the land-reform in 1940s. Rather, the indigenous cultural and ethical resources of rural society that Zhao tried to mobilize here were the egalitarianism and mutual-aid spirit that had long existed among the poor peasants and hired hands in the countryside. As such, the natural ethics of the underprivileged and the poor inherently involves a class dimension that fits the modern politics of Communist Party.

Embedded in this community is a whole new conception of “individual,” “romantic love,” “marriage” and “family.” If we recall Marx’s description of clan commune in *Grundrisse*, then, what characterizes premodern commune is the indistinctness of individual and his community; to become modern, means to make the individual detached and separated from his immediate environment which is the commune. However, the “individual” in his novels does not have an unchanging inner core that is immune to the external changes or is “self-sufficient.” Rather, in his novel, individual, romantic love, family, or marriage, is always mediated by the community, and always in a changing relation, constantly intervened and changed by others. In his novels, the community constantly functions a liberating power that aids individual’s emancipation from the “backward” status of small peasant family.

In *Sanliwan Village*, the emancipating power of the community is shown in the story of Ma Youyi, a young man with a weak personality, who is overpowered by his dominating and manipulative mother. His mother, nicknamed “Always Right” (as she always likes to override the opinions of others), tries desperately to get Youyi to concern more about the family and to stop him from associating with his friends in the cooperative. She often sarcastically calls Youyi’s friends in the cooperative “little mothers,” as if she is fighting over the control over her son with the cooperative. Disliking Youyi’s girlfriend Lingzhi, who they think is too independent to control, the family try to arrange Youyi’s marriage with another girl Xiaojun. Taking Youyi’s fierce resistance as “madness” or “illness,” they use the traditional method – locking him up in the house and forbidding outsiders from visiting him. Anyone who is familiar with May Fourth literature would easily understand the meaning of the metaphors of “locked house,” “illness,” and “mad man” - they are typical imageries used by Lu Xun to refer to the oppression of modern individual by “feudalism.” Hence, Youyi’s breaking away from family and fighting for his romantic love is conscious echoing of the May Fourth theme of individual emancipation. To this extent, Zhao shows his influence from May Fourth literature.

However, Zhao is not simply repeating May Fourth theme of individual emancipation from “feudalism” (which, in Marxist context, often comes from the premodern community), rather, the source of oppression and suffocation of individual comes from the backward mode of small peasant economy. The room where Youyi is locked is not just the “feudal family” in May Fourth literature, but a symbol of “small peasant family.” Zhao depicts his room as such:

It was too dark inside to see him at first, but by degrees she made out that he was lying on a bed by the south wall. This room had only one door and one small window on the north side, both facing the wall of the east wing. There had been two windows behind Yu-yi's bed giving on the open country, but Muddlehead had nailed boards over them and piled up bricks inside as a precaution against thieves. It was hard in the gloom to see what was in here. At the head of Yu-yi's bed loomed a large grain bin, in front of the bin were vats, on top of the vats were cases, on top of the cases were crates, and on top of the crates were some small, shadowy objects.<sup>148</sup>

Here, the depiction of Youyi's bedroom accurately conveys the Ma Family as a typical small holder's family – windows nailed with boards to prevent thieves, the room stuffed with bins, vats, cases, crates for hoarding goods. The “darkness” and “suffocating” atmosphere of the room where Yu-yi sleeps reminds us of Lu Xun's depiction of “iron house” where the masses sleep, but such darkness and suffocation derives not from “feudalist thoughts” but from the isolated state of small peasants, who reject social association with others. Such isolation and lack of communication, as Marx points out in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, is precisely what prevents peasants from forming into meaning political association and acquiring political agency.<sup>149</sup> Hence, Youyi's act of self-emancipation – breaking out of the Ma House – is endowed with the meaning of breaking out of the “backward” mode of small peasant economy.

Interestingly, Youyi's individual emancipation and his escape from the small peasant family is facilitated by the community. When Youyi ran out of the house, with his parents chasing behind, the crowd played a protecting role, deterring Youyi's family from chasing him and dragging him back. When Youyi runs out of the house

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<sup>148</sup> Zhao Shuli, *Sanliwan Village*, trans. Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1957), 186

<sup>149</sup> Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works*, vol. 1. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969, 481.

“with his father and mother at his heels,” “folks were flocking home, and all the passers-by stood still to watch, while the women and children left at home ran out when they heard the noise.”

And when Muddlehead suddenly grabbed the crate with both hands, Yu-yi let go of it, leaving his father to hold it, and pushed his way into the crowd.

“Stop him!” screamed Always Right. “He’s off his head!”

Some men laid hold of Yu-yi.

“Don’t worry about me!” he said. “I’m no madder than you are! They locked me up because I wouldn’t agree to this marriage they’ve arranged. I’d like you all to know I’m not going to be forced into it. I’ll trouble you to tell Hsiao-Chun, if you see her, she look for a husband elsewhere!

Since he was talking sense, they let him go, and he squeezed his way past.

“Don’t let him get away!” screamed his mother, in hot pursuit.

“Go on home, granny!” the neighbors advised her. “You can’t lock up a strapping young fellow like that!”<sup>150</sup>

Here, the crowd provide a shelter for Youyi’s escape, as he “pushed his way into the crowd.” More importantly, public space becomes a space where lies – Youyi’s “madness” and “illness” (which was used as the excuse to lock him up) – gets to be exposed under the sun. At first, people who thought that he was ill tried to help his parents catch him, but after Youyi explained and exposed his mother’s scheme, those people turned to stop his parents, and let Youyi “squeeze his way past.”

The crowd also facilitates woman’s liberation. When Chu-ying was bullied by her mother-in-law and sister-in-law (nicknamed “Spitfire”), she ran to the Flagstaff Compound to seek help from the army dependents’ committee. As her father-in-law Muddlehead chased her to the Flagstaff Compound trying to stop her, he was blocked by the crowd who had gathered in the courtyard. As he tried to find her out, the onlookers deliberately covered for her.

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<sup>150</sup> Zhao, *Sanliwan Village*, 218-219.



Realizing that Chu-ying must have been here, Muddlehead asked one of the onlookers where she was. He was told she had left for a meal.

“She’s not been home,” said Muddlehead.

“What’s to stop her from having a meal with someone else?”

...

This was common knowledge to everyone there – they all knew where Chu-ying was – but because they resented the way Always Right and Spitfire bullied her, no one would tell Muddlehead. Since he knew it was no use asking, and futile to search blindly for her, he decided to wait in the crowd.<sup>151</sup>

Here, what protected the daughter-in-law Chu-ying from the bully of her husband’s family was not the state’s authority, army dependents’ committee, but the crowd of onlookers; and their intervention and protection of Chu-ying was not according to the state’s law (that army’s dependents must be protected), but out of their plain sense of justice that a woman should not be bullied by her mother-in-law out of no reason; and such plain sense of justice was rooted in the egalitarian tradition among poor people in rural society instead of deriving from the state’s law. Therefore, the rural community seems to be a “self-ruling” community which runs on its internal cultural and ethical logic and does not rely on external law or rule of the state.

Interestingly, in Zhao’s fictions, “the crowd” often serves as the positive function of “truth-telling,” facilitating women’s emancipation, serving social justice, and providing protection for the weak and the underprivileged. For example, in *Liu Er’he and Wang Jisheng* (刘二和与王继圣) (1947), the hired worker Jubao accused the landlord out loud while hiding himself in the crowd, which protect him from being captured by the landlord and his servants. In *Sanliwan Village*, when Man-hsi revealed

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 126-127.

the tricks of the animal broker, he took cover of the crowd, whose supporting words exerted a powerful intervention to the illegal behavior of the swindler.

Zhao's image of "crowd" is obviously different from the description of "crowd," "mob," and "masses" in modern political theory. According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the mob and the masses are passive existence that "cannot act of their own accord," and "their collection of differences remains inert and can easily appear as one indifferent aggregate," making them "susceptible to external manipulation."<sup>152</sup> What causes their political inertia is lack of communication and association, which are characteristic of premodern small peasants.

According to Marx, what prevents small peasants from becoming modern subjects is their lack of communication and mutual isolation in the premodern form of small peasant economy - "a small holding, a peasant and his family, alongside them another small holding, another peasant and another family," like "a sack of potatoes."<sup>153</sup> In the small peasant economy, "each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it itself directly produces the major part of its consumption and thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse of society." "In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they

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<sup>152</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 100

<sup>153</sup> Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," 478-479.

must be represented.”<sup>154</sup> Hence, in his letter to Vera Zasulich, Marx proposes that the key to reinvent Russian village commune into a modern social organization is to overcome the “lack of connection between the lives of different communes” and to found “a peasant assembly chosen by the communes themselves.”<sup>155</sup>

Based on Marx’s conception of “commune” in his letter to Vera Zasulich, Hardt and Negri develop the concept of “the common.” Although Marx did not explicitly use the term “common,” Hardt and Negri point out, what Marx intuited to be the revolutionary forms of anti-modernity were in fact “planted firmly on the common.”<sup>156</sup> For them, a key characteristic that distinguished the “common” from other forms of plural collectives such as the crowd, the masses and the mob, is that the common “designates an active social subject,” while the latter “are fundamentally passive in the sense that they cannot act by themselves but rather must be led.”<sup>157</sup> In a word, the “common” denotes a public space acting in which social subjects with full political agency are free to communicate and associate.

In Sanliwan Village, the Flagstaff Compound serves precisely as such a space for communication and association of peasants. It is not only a political center (the office of the village administration, and headquarter of agricultural collective), but also the center of the ethical and cultural world of peasants, a “natural civil court” where issues about family and marriage are argued, reconciled, and solved, such as Yu-sheng’s divorce and Chu-ying’s separation from her husband’s home. Hence,

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 106

<sup>155</sup> Karl Marx, “Drafts of a Reply”, 111, 116, 120

<sup>156</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 89

<sup>157</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 100

people often stop by to watch how family affairs get to be solved; “some of them were young people with baskets, sacks or tools, who had dropped in on their way to the threshing-floor to see what decision was taken – any question connected with marriage aroused their interest.”<sup>158</sup> And since it was an open space where people were free to stop by, “there was much coming and going, much squeezing in and out.”<sup>159</sup>

Because of the communication, debates, and mobility, Flagstaff Compound becomes a public and transparent space where truth gets to be told and lies get exposed. After hearing Chu-ying’s complaints about how her husband’s family bullied her, the head of the army dependents’ committee Hsiao-feng sent for Chu-ying’s mother-in-law “Always Right” and sister-in-law “Spitfire” and let the three give account of the story in front of the crowd. When the three told different stories, Man-hsi and Youyi, as eyewitnesses, were sent for to attest to the validity of their stories. Man-hsi told the crowd how Chu-ying has been unjustly treated by the family; on the other hand, Yu-yi at first did not dare to testify against his mother, but he felt ashamed to lie in front of people, and chose to tell the truth. As a result, “Always Right” and “Spitfire” had no way but return home, while Chu-ying stayed in the compound as other army dependents comforted her and gave her advice how to separate from the family. In the end, with the mediation of the village cadres, Chu-ying got to divided property with Ma Family, and carried her and her husband’s own share of land to join the co-operative. The community actually help Chu-ying become an economically independent individual by helping her break away from the Ma family.

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<sup>158</sup> Zhao, *Sanliwan Village*, 126.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

Besides individual freedom, romantic love and marriage is also mediated by the community. Zhao Shuli's depiction of peasant's "romantic love" is very different from modern fictions. Romantic love usually happens between two modern individuals who fight against the entire society, but as we discussed above, Zhao's character is not a typical bourgeois "modern individual" with an unshaking inner core, hence the "romantic love," accordingly, does not have a firm ground but is "drifting" and changes along with the situation, which makes it "situational."

In the story, Lingzhi and Youyi are the only two middle school graduates in the village (hence the only two "cultured" youths), and hence are fond of each other. But as Youyi's family tried to break them up and set Youyi up with another girl Xiaojun, seeing that Youyi was too weak to stand up against his family, Lingzhi, in disappointment, turned to another young man Yusheng, who she became fond of while working with him in the co-operative. Interestingly, the collective activities of the cooperative were what facilitated Ling-chih and Yu-sheng's romantic love. "Since borrowing Ling-chih's geometry set, Yu-sheng had often consulted her on his calculations, and she had discovered what a good student he was – very quick in the uptake. So she was glad to help, and during the last few days had taught him a good deal of simple arithmetic."<sup>160</sup> "Though she had lent him a hand several times since the night of the first when she helped him with the roller, they had never been together for more than half an hour. Yet each occasion stood out vividly in her mind. Not one detail had she forgotten."<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 210.

In describing the thought process of Lingzhi when she decided to give up Youyi and turned to Yusheng as a candidate for relationship, the novel shows a very different understanding of romantic love:

If she gave up Yu-yi, there was no one else worth considering in Sanliwan. She thought fleetingly of Yu-sheng, but turned him down at once.

“He’s straight, dependable, unselfish, intelligent, competent, and handsome! But he’s had no education!”

She searched her memory for other boys, but kept coming back to Yu-sheng. Though she had lent him a hand several times since the night of the first when she helped him with the roller, they had never been together for more than half an hour. Yet each occasion stood out vividly in her mind. Not one detail had she forgotten.

“Does this mean I’m in love with Yu-sheng?” she wondered.

Her heart did not deny it.

“So quickly? All the time I’ve been with Yu-yi didn’t count for so much as these few hours!”

She started comparing the two of them, and Yu-sheng beat Yu-yi in every respect. Yu-sheng gave all his thought to building socialism, Yu-yi to obeying his feudal minded mother.

“I must start considering Yu-sheng!” she decided.

This seems to go against the usual understanding of “romantic love.” Lingzhi made the decision by comparing the personality and families of the two candidates, as if “love” was not based on one’s inner core of “heart” that supports one to fight against the society, but depends on “external” conditions. But it precisely illustrates that there is not a modern dualism of “inner heart” and “external environment” in Zhao Shuli’s world; in his world, the “heart” and the “mind” is always mediated by one’s interaction with the world, by one’s relationship with one’s family, with the community.

Similarly, Yu-mei’s romantic relationship with You-yi changes with the situation and is “conditional.” After being turned down by Ling-zhi, Youyi turned to

Yu-mei to propose marriage, a girl he had got along well but had not seriously considered marriage before. Yu-mei, “knowing that Yu-yi cared more for Ling-chih than of her, had never seriously thought of him as a husband” either; but now that situation had changed and Ling-chih was out of the way, she could consider him. Nevertheless, Yu-mei doubted his sincerity, thinking, “It’s not as if you thought all that of me before! If Ling-chih hadn’t found someone else, you’d not have been in this hurry!” Therefore, she laid down certain conditions – Yu-yi must stand up against his dominating mother and break from his selfish family and join the cooperative with her. Her romantic love, hence, was conditioned on his actual practice - “My answer depends on how things go from now on!”<sup>162</sup> Seeing that Yu-mei didn’t want to get along with his family and wanted to stay in the cooperative, Yu-yi finally separated from the Ma family and registered his own household together with Yu-mei.

At any rate, it seems to be a belief or philosophy of Zhao Shuli that people can change with situation and through practice, hence, there is always possibility to transform a person and lead him toward good direction by changing the environment. There is not an unshakable inner core of “individual”; rather, everyone changes his practice along with the changing environment and situation. Hence, we see, those who were not willing to join the cooperative at the beginning, seeing their children break away from the family and join the cooperative, or seeing that working alone yields less than working with others in the cooperative, ultimately change their minds and decide to join the cooperative. One’s marriage, family affairs, or romantic love, all change with situation and are mediated and re-defined by one’s surrounding community. The

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 221, 222.

modern notions such as “family”, “marriage”, “individual”, and “romantic love”, which have been grounded in a “solitary” individual, are redefined as mediated by and rooted in community.

***Liu Qing’s “The Builders”: a Modern Subject that Transforms the Community***

Compared to Zhao Shuli, which viewed collectivization from the native perspective of peasants and local rural community, Liu Qing had a stronger passion for “modernization”. Liu Qing was born in rural region too, but, like most modern Chinese intellectual, he was deeply influenced by May Fourth literature and modern novels, and his novel was a typical modern novel that features a modern subject with psychological description. And like many Chinese intellectuals in a under-developed socialist state, Liu Qing had a passion for modernization. He was excited about the tremendous change that the industrialization and modern state brings into peasant’s world. Besides, he read a lot of theoretical works of Marxism, newspapers, and party’s policy documents about collectivization, and was well-informed of the significance of collectivization as a part of the “modernization” of the state. Accordingly, Liu Qing’s novel, *The Builders* (Chuangyeshi, 创业史) (1962) is infused with his theoretical thinking of the “collectivization” movement. Setting the time of the story at 1953, the year when the state launched the “First Five Year Plan”, he consciously links the agrarian commune to the larger picture of the socialist state’s modernization, using a passionate language to describe the modernization in China:

Spring in 1953 was exactly the same as the one thousand nine hundred and fifty-two springs that had gone before.

...



But in the spring of 1953, people's feelings were very different from what they had been during the previous one thousand nine hundred and fifty-two springs.

What had they done, these historic personages sleeping in the tombs of Tang and Han? They studied and created many laws and rules and regulations. Dressed in helmets and armour, spears in hand, they fought many battles. They wrote dignified essays and beautiful poems. Some performed great deeds, some committed terrible mistakes. Some, although they did a definite amount of good, also did a certain amount of harm.

But not one of them ever had any connection with a Five-Year Plan.

Spring of 1953 was the first spring of China's First Five-Year Plan for socialist economic construction. After the frozen earth thawed, many were the big construction projects that began, the new railway lines that were started, the teams of surveyors who set forth. China, which had been in the merciless grasp of foreign capitalists and the Kuomintang government for years and years, was commencing planned construction at last.

In the spring of 1953, new buildings sites, surrounded by fences of wire and bamboo, appeared in the outskirts of Si'an. Red merit banners floated above the competing work teams. The decrepit ancient capital began to regain its youth. Sewers were dug, streets were widened and paved. In the city and in the suburbs, vehicles laden with steel girders, cement, timber, sand and gravel jammed roads laid when Si'an was the famed Chang An of antiquity.

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In spring of 1953 all China's vast land was a huge panorama, a symphony, collective dance, of the First Five-Year Plan.

Spring of 1953 – another turning point in history.<sup>163</sup>

In Liu Qing's passionate and lyrical language, 1953 is marked as a "turning point in history", in which for the first time, the countryside was involved into "History" because of the state's industrialization and "First Five-Year Plan."

In order to enter History, a peasant must become a modern subject. *The Builders* is a typical bildungsroman, featuring the growth of a young peasant Liang Sheng-pao in the collectivization movement. As a party intellectual, Liu Qing is familiar with Marx's theory about small peasants, especially the famous text *The Eighteenth*

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<sup>163</sup> Liu Qing, *The Builders* 创业史, trans. Sidney Shapiro (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1964), 435-436.

*Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. If traditional peasant is a non-political figure that only passively reacts to the stimulation of environment, conforming to domination, satisfied with the given status quo, and lacking the courage to make change, then Liu Qing's bildungsroman intended to shows how peasants bid farewell to their way of life of thousands of years old and became active political subjects to create "History," the history of the modernization of the socialist state. The "bildung" of modern subjectivity is a process of overcoming the immediate "materiality" with transcendent "spirit", to get rid of the obsession with immediacy of materiality and identify with the noble and transcendent ideal of communism and socialism.

In the novel, the biggest characteristic that Liu Qing accords to the protagonist Liang Sheng-pao is his interiority, which alienates him from the surrounding environment. If traditional peasant is characterized as "fundamentally conservative, isolated, and capable only of reaction, not of autonomous political action of its own,"<sup>164</sup> then Liang Sheng-pao is marked as being different from the "passive masses," and "not like a peasant" at all. When Sheng-pao makes his first appearance in the novel, he is on a trip to another county to buy rice seeds for his mutual-aid team:

Because the river was so rapid at this time of the year, there was no evening ferry service. Passengers arriving on the late train had to spend the night in town. Attendants from the local hotels were explaining the situation to the newcomers and leading them to their various establishments. In a few moments the little street was empty. Only Sheng-pao remained. Pieces of gunny sacking over his head and shoulders and wrapped around his bed roll, the young peasant stood alone in the inky darkness beneath and old mat awning extending from the wall of the station building.

Why didn't he go to a hotel? Surely they weren't all filled?

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<sup>164</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 122

No, but Sheng-pao did have a small problem. He had come several hundred *li* to buy rice seed. The better hotels here charged forty or fifty cents a night. Even if you shared a large heated *kang* with several other guests, the cost was twenty cents. Sheng-pao hated to spend the money. When he left his home on the Tang Stream, this item had not been included in his budget.<sup>165</sup>

The novel depicts for us a person in aloofness. In the raining night when “spring rain came hissing down,” while other passengers seek shelter and hide into the hotels in a rainy night, Sheng-pao “stood alone in the inky darkness.” If hiding into a warm shelter is a natural and spontaneous reaction of most ordinary people to the cold rainy night, like animals reacts naturally to the environment, then Sheng-pao distanced himself from the environment and displays his “indifference” to the disrupting element of the surrounding, immersed in his own thoughts and thinking about how to spend the night - “As he stood in the little street beside the station, his mind went back to the paddy fields of Frog Flat.” He recalled “how hard it had been, collecting money for the trip. ... He even had to advance money for two families of his own team. If he hadn’t, hey! – there wouldn’t have been the breath of chance that every member of the team would switch to a better strain of seed as their plan provided.”<sup>166</sup> After going through a calculation of “how much money he had brought, how much seed he was going to buy, its cost of transport, and the price of his own round trip fare,” Sheng-pao made up his mind to save the money: “Even if I have to sleep out under the eaves, I’m going to save that twenty cents.”<sup>167</sup> What we see here is a modern subject who is determined to “endure” the unfavourable material conditions and determined to “overcome” the

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<sup>165</sup> Liu, *The Builders*, 92-93.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 94.

difficulty to carry out his will. Shengbao's determination to endure the coldness to sleep out under the eaves is a conscious, well-planned choice that transcends the immediate environment and overcomes the difficulty. This capacity to distance himself from the given surroundings and transcend it marks him out as a modern subject.

According to Naoki Sakai, this "alienation" and "interiority," or, one's negative relation with the species as the substratum, is a defining feature of modern subjectivity. "In immediacy, the individual would never constitute itself as a subject, it becomes a subject by returning to itself after reflecting upon and distancing itself from its immediate inheritance, through self-negation."<sup>168</sup> While negating the immediate surroundings, the subject identifies with a higher, transcendental plane. For a modern subject, this "transcendental" plane is usually the "state," hence, the modern subject is always a national subject. For Liu Qing, such "transcendental" plane is the "Communist Party's policy" and its ideal of "socialism" and "communism." Liu Qing was passionate about promoting the Party's lines. He once said, "As I understand, 'the need of politics, class, and masses' means the correct line, policy, and guidelines of the Party."<sup>169</sup> In fact, because Liu stood too close to the "Party", that he mistakenly followed the wrong line during Cultural Revolution, for which he had to apologize, "I didn't make distinction between correct line and wrong line. Because I didn't have enough consciousness about the 'lines', I talked about Party's newspaper and party's

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<sup>168</sup> Naoki Sakai, "Subject and Substratum: On Japanese Imperial Nationalism," *Cultural Studies*, 14: 3-4 (2000): 485.

<sup>169</sup> Liu Qing, "Meixue biji" 美学笔记 ("Aesthetic notes"), in *Liu Qing Wenji* 柳青文集 (Anthology of Liu Qing), vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), 290

editorial in a general way and didn't distinguish good lines and bad lines.”<sup>170</sup> Liu Qing consciously portrays Sheng-pao to be a young man that loyally follows the Communist Party's leadership: “He should listen to the Party, adopt the principle of life that the Party promotes and become a model, to enhance the consciousness of the masses, and to fight the opposite force with the superiority of mutual aid and cooperation.”<sup>171</sup>

In their expedition into the mountain to cut bamboo, while other peasants “were discussing the differences between the weather in the mountains and the weather on the plain,” Shengbao “neither joined in their conversation nor listened to it,” but “was involved in his own thoughts, which to him were highly entertaining.”<sup>172</sup> He was thinking of a badly informed peasant who mistakenly thought that Sheng-pao was leading the group at the behest of Sheng-lu, his well-to-do peasant cousin, instead of Party's leadership. Think “that was certainly comical, Sheng-pao couldn't repress a chuckle.” Here, in analyzing the peasant's words, Sheng-pao consciously distances himself from the peasants, “objectifying” them in his analysis

Sheng-pao continued meditating. It didn't matter that the stranger obviously had little regard for him. Young Sheng-pao was determined to learn from the broad-mindedness of Communists with long-range spiritual goals. He wasn't thin-skinned. It didn't matter a bit whether people considered him important. But the thing intrigued him. Why? Secretary Wang had put his finger on it exactly during the Party rectification. The secretary said that in the great sea of the small peasant economy, the well-to-do middle peasant was the most respected. He usually had a fine horse, or a large household, or someone in the family earning a good salary as a middle-school teacher. His prestige in

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<sup>170</sup> Liu Qing, “Zai shanxisheng chubanju zhaokai de yeyu zuozhe chuangzuo zuotanhui shang de jianghua” 在陕西省出版局召开的业余作者创作座谈会上的讲话 (Talk at the Shanxi Province Publishing Bureau's symposium of amateur writers), in *Liu Qing Wenji*, vol. 4, 318.

<sup>171</sup> Liu, “Meixue biji,” 288.

<sup>172</sup> Liu, *The Builders*, 397.

the surrounding countryside was high. But, Secretary Wang asserted definitely, in the socialist society of future, the system of private property would be eliminated. In the village, this ridiculous situation would naturally also change.

“How right Secretary Wang is,” Sheng-pao thought in astonishment. Sheng-pao often noted practical proof of revolutionary theory in his daily life. Now, marching through a mountain forest, he had made a new discovery regarding revolutionary theory, and it increased the spring in his step. How fascinating life was! He loved it ardently.<sup>173</sup>

What “pulls” Sheng-pao out of the immediacy and materiality of everyday life in which the other peasants are embedded in an “organic” way are the “abstract” or “metaphysical” ideas of the Marxist “revolutionary theory” about small peasants and class struggle, which he learned from the Communist Party. Hence, Sheng-pao is able to transcend the limited and narrow scope of the village life and see the whole big picture (the “blueprint” of the state) in which peasants gain their meaning of life by working for the greater cause of China industrialization (otherwise they would not be able to understand why 13% of their products have to be turned into the state as tax, and why the extra products must be sold to the State at a mandated low price).

This priority of the “spirit” over the “material” is intimately linked with a teleological modernist worldview in which Liu Qing firmly believed. When visiting Soviet Union, Liu Qing was deeply moved by the mental state of Soviet people: “They are the people that head toward a spiritual goal and along with time; this spiritual goal is communism! They are living by the principle of ‘all behaviors that pursue spiritual principles are good behaviors!’”<sup>174</sup> “If a man works only for his money and material needs, he cannot do great things, just like a person who writes for remunerations

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<sup>173</sup> Liu, *The Builders*, 398.

<sup>174</sup> Liu Qing, “Sulian renmin shi zhenzheng xingfu de ren” 苏联人民是真正幸福的人 (Soviet people are the truly happy people), in *Liu Qing Wenji*, vol. 4, 169.

cannot produce great works. But if a person doesn't care about material return and put all of his effort into working for the nation, the people, and his honor, then he will create miracle.”<sup>175</sup>

In the novel, with the strong passion for the teleological progress towards modernization, Liu Qing passionately call for peasants to break away with the bound of the trivial materiality of “property” and throw themselves into “History”, abandoning the “material” and embracing the “spiritual”:

Peasants, oh, peasants. What importance they attached to their land, draught animals, buildings, grain, to every bit of property they owned – was it only a carrying pole, a piece of rope, or a little ring on the handle of their plough. Any change in history made some people tremble, so fearful were they of losing even a bundle of straw.

Such prioritization of “spirit” over “materiality” typifies in Sheng-pao's romantic relationship with Kai-hsia, a girl he is fond of. Faced with the brave confession of Kai-hsia, Sheng-pao suppressed his impulse to get intimate with her:

Sheng-pao longed to wrap this girl who loved him in his strong arms and kiss her lips. But he didn't. Kissing a woman for the first time in life is a big event for any honest man.

His reason as a communist took precedence over the human weakness to yield to emotions. He thought, once they hold and kiss, their relationship would take a radical turn. Sheng-pao, who had never tasted sex in his life, was bound to stay with Kai-hsia once he had time. If it was slack season with long winter nights, how would sweet sex life matter? Communists are humans, too. But the summer harvest and rice shoot transplanting were about to begin. He had to control human being's elementary instinct and elementary feelings with noble spirit.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 170

Not only Sheng-pao's personal emotions must give way to the public cause of the mutual-aid team or the collectivization, but also the "elementary instinct" and "elementary feelings" should be overcome by the "noble spirit" as a Communist.

Such praising of the "spiritual" over the "material" was stressed to an even greater extent in his fiction "Stubborn through Iron" (hen tou tie, 狠透铁), written in 1958 during Great Leap Forward. In the story, the fifty-three-year-old man, nicknamed "stubborn through iron", suffers serious back pain and foot pain due to his overwork as a leader of production team. Nonetheless, he insisted on accepting the job of the team leader again after deposing a corrupted cadre. Despite his wife's weeping and pleading to give up this job so as "to let him live a few more years," he was nevertheless determined to lead the production team to undertake an even bigger project – to turn the arid land into water fields. Because the Great Leap Forward, as Wen Tiejun points out, was in essence a process of primitive accumulation based on the intense input of human labor in place of capital, turning "labor power" (L) directly into "capital" (K) under the condition of the extreme lack of capital, therefore, Liu Qing's calling for "overcoming" laborer's body's physical limit to strive for a higher spiritual goal, in the context of Great Leap Forward, amounted to calling for over expending of human's labor power onto the building of aqueducts, bridges, and roads, which were frequently undertaken during Great Leap Forward.<sup>176</sup> As is well known, such overt expending of labor power onto infrastructure construction to the point of its exhaustion, and the extreme material destitution resulted from the over extraction of agricultural surplus products, caused the "Great Famine" and mass deaths in early

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<sup>176</sup> Wen, *Baci Weiji*, 5, 54.



1960s. And Liu Qing unfortunately ended up being a state's agent that contributed to such exploitation of peasantry.

As a matter of fact, to the extent that “socialism” is “socialism within one state”, “socialism” is closely bound with the the need of the “state” for primitive accumulation. However, we must refrain from reducing Liu Qing to a “statist,” but should recognize a more nuanced relationship between industry and agriculture, between the state and the collective in the socialism. When Liu Qing was writing the novel, it was still at the early stage of collectivization, and collective interest of local commune had not yet conflicted with state's interest. Modernization of the commune is part of the modernization of the state. The more developed the commune, the more grains they will yield, and the more surplus product they can contribute to the state. In the blueprint of the “modernization” of the socialist state outlined by Chinese Marxists, agriculture, though sacrificed for a short term, would ultimately benefit from the development of industry and the modern state. When Liu Qing persuaded peasants to turn in the surplus products to the state in 1954, he stressed how modern industry (the advanced productive force) could greatly contribute to agriculture's development and modernization:

How many more grains they yielded from using the chemical fertilizers produced by the chemical factory? How much more water they got and how much more grains they yielded by using the modern water wheel manufactured by the modern factory instead of the old-style wooden water wheel inherited from Qing Dynasty? How many more grains they yielded by organizing and engaging in collective labor? And before they had all these conditions, how many grains did they get? And who gave them such conditions? When their mutual-aid team was on the brink of disintegration, who sent them help? Who prepared for them the chemical fertilizers and

new-style water wheel? Who sent people to live in the village and gave technical instructions?<sup>177</sup>

Liu Qing tried to make the peasants aware that “the extra grains were given by the Party, the government, and the working class,” therefore they had no reason to decline selling the extra grains to the state at a reasonable price. Liu explained, “the grains sold to the state will turn into more and better fertilizers and new-style implements at cheaper prices, as well as more capable cadres and technicians. Given such good cycle, it be long before the tractors drive into villages.”<sup>178</sup> In *The Builders*, the state played a crucial role of helping Sheng-pao’s mutual-aid team to develop, sending the technicians to their village to teach villagers new technique of planting seeds, helping them prevent the insect hazard, and providing them with the loans for production.

On the other hand, the tension between the “spiritual” and the “material” should be understood in a more complex way. In fact, the ability of the modern subject to “transcend” his immediate and material interest and foresee the “abstract” things, is what is demanded for the running of a agricultural cooperative. Economically speaking, the agricultural co-operative, as a modern economic organization, must observe the economic law of accumulation, not unlike modern enterprise, which requires a modern mindset of investment and long-term planning. An agricultural co-operative would need to set aside some percentage of income as “productive fund” (公积金, gong ji jin) and “welfare fund” (公益金, gong yi jin). While “productive fund”

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<sup>177</sup> Liu Qing, “Dengta, zhaoyao zhe women ba!” 灯塔，照耀着我们吧！（Light beacon, shine on us!), in *Liu Qing Wenji*, vol. 4, 121.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

is to be re-invested in the subsequent rounds of expanded reproduction for the sake of long-term development of the co-operative, “welfare fund” is to be expended on taking care of the weak, the old, and the widowed of the co-operative. In enterprise, when spending money onto production, the entrepreneur foresees the return of capital investment in the long term, even though he has nothing to gain immediately. In the same way, the expanded production of co-operative demands a portion of money to be used as productive fund instead of for immediate consumption, therefore it is necessary that peasants overcome the shortsightedness that only sees immediate and visible gains and must prepare for the potential loss and risk, because like enterprise the initial investment cannot guarantee immediate and safe return.

Moreover, in actuality, after setting aside the “productive fund” (for expanded production) and “welfare fund” (for taking care of the incapable members), the co-operative would keep a portion of products for its self-consumption, and turn the rest of the products to the state. Hence, what is involved here is the multiple relationship of the individual, collective, and the state, which are often in tension. Even if the product does go to the state, there is often inherent tension between “the collective interest” and “individual interest,” that is, whether to use the money for personal consumption, or to put the money back into expanded production of the cooperative. As the report of Agriculture Ministry pointed out: “If the accumulation of public funds increases too fast, it will affect negatively the income of members of the co-operatives. Peasants who join the co-operatives are looking for more grains, more dividends, more revenues, and better living conditions. If the public assets increase and the revenues of the individual decrease, peasants’ enthusiasm will go down, and the collective cause

won't last long. Therefore, we should restrain the accumulation of public funds, and make it slower and more stable.”<sup>179</sup> For many peasants who have got used to the self-sufficient small holdership, it is hard to accept the “abstract” and rational planning for the collective.

In the novel, Jen the Fourth's attitude to his first sum of income reveals the typical mind of a traditional peasant. Afraid that the money invested in buying fertilizers for the experiment of the new strain of rice seeds might go into vain, he wants to take back his share of the investment to buy grains to improve the living conditions of the family. In other words, he is afraid of the risks that capital investment involves and asks for an immediate gain. Jen confesses: “I've got a whole houseful of kids, all with mouths waiting to be fed. When they're hungry if you don't give them a little something, they cry. I'm scared, I've been poor too long. And that's the truth. When we made the plan, I didn't have a penny. If you said storm the heavens, I'd have mounted a cloud. But now I've got a few *yuan* in my hands. I can't bear to spend them. I say to myself - suppose the close planting doesn't work? All that money will be wasted.”<sup>180</sup> After repeated persuasions of others and after going through many inner struggles, Jen finally decides to take the risk, saying: “All right. Even if it's a cliff, I'll leap off it with you together.” Such a “leap” into the unknown risk like leaping off the cliff, is precisely a modern mind for capitalist investment and scientific experiment.

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<sup>179</sup> Deng Zihui, “Zai quanguo diyici nongcun gongzuo huiyi shang de zongjie baogao” 在全国第一次农村工作会议上的总结报告 (The Concluding Report at the First National Conference of Agriculture Work), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 139

<sup>180</sup> Liu, *The Builders*, 520.

While Jen the Fourth's obsession with the immediate and the "material" is typical of peasantry, we see a different attitude in Shengbao. After the huge harvest, the whole village watch what he would do with the money. Thinking that he will use the money to purchase more land for himself, "a number of people with land to sell had dogged his footsteps." However, "Sheng-pao didn't buy any land. He said he was going to invest in expanding the mutual-aid team's production."<sup>181</sup> Putting the money back into the expanded production of mutual-aid team is precisely a modern capitalistic behaviour; instead of consuming the money immediately, he uses it for re-investment to generate more money. In this light, the future-oriented modernist perspective cannot not be completely subsumed by the logic of the state, but may indicate the possibility of a "better commune."

In the novel, the mutual-aid team organized themselves together and ventured into the Zhongnan Mountain to cut bamboo and make brooms to earn their first sum of money as the starting fund. This organized effort is a very modern behavior that is rarely seen on peasants. Like Sheng-pao's father sneered at him: "Who can compare with a young fellow like you – leading forth your army, building camp, setting up your cooking cauldron, spending a month in the mountains cutting bamboo. Huh! You'd think he was out to conquer a territory. Who ever saw a peasant behave like that?"<sup>182</sup> However, the goal of their modern venture is to construct a better community, of which their families are a part. Especially, in depicting these peasants, Liu Qing highlights their sentimental attachment to the local life-world and their intimate feelings for the "things" in their hometown, conveying a sense of "localness" that

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 556

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 285.

differentiates from the state. When their fellow villager Gao Zengfu came from afar to visit the mutual-aid team in the deep mountains, seeing their fellow villager for the first time in months, the team of peasants get excited:

Aiyaya, the whole crowd, in clothes ripped by brambles, immediately rushed to Tseng-fu, who was wearing felt foot bindings and straw sandals for climbing mountain paths, and surrounded him enthusiastically. ...

Good old Tseng-fu. He was a Frog Flat man. He came from where their parents, wives, kids, thatched cottages, land, draught oxen, pigs and chickens were. His appearance in the narrow mountain ravine was like the sudden arrival of an emissary from the world of men. He had come just at the right time. Happily smiling, everyone felt like embracing him and kissing his thin serious face.<sup>183</sup>

Quite different from his constant praising of the “transcendental” spirit over material, Liu here highlights the concrete materiality of their daily life and community - “their parents, wives, kids, thatched cottages, land, draught oxen, pigs and chickens.” It was these concrete material aspects of daily life that motivated the poor peasants to venture into the wild and dangerous mountains.

Even the most “solitary” person, Sheng-pao, who possesses a “transcending” personality and who have ambition to “do great things,” is not completely dislocated from the rural life-world. Although Liu Qing consciously places Sheng-pao’s founding of cooperative within the larger picture the state’s industrialization, he nevertheless makes Sheng-pao distanced from the “state.” The narrator tells us, Sheng-pao rarely thinks of “big things” like “Five Year Plan” and “industrialization”, but remains concerned about business of the cooperative in the village:

In his idle moments, Sheng-pao thought of home. During the day, he climbed the slopes and scaled the ridges with the others. At night when, after

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 430.

a session of jollity, the fifteen men were snoring peacefully, Sheng-pao lay on his bed of boughs and grass listening to the wind moaning through the trees on the opposite mountain slope and wondering how Huan-hsi was doing with the rice sowing. Had the agronomist come yet? How was Huan-hsi getting on with Sheng-lu? The sowing was another important matter in their life, Sheng-pao felt. As to the war in Korea and the armistice negotiations at Panmunjom, as to the country's industrialization, he didn't understand much about that. Anyway, we have Chairman Mao who would take care of such things.<sup>184</sup>

We are told that Shengbao rarely thinks about grand blueprints at the state level such as Korean War and “industrialization.” Rather, his mind is preoccupied with the progress of the rest of mutual-aid team in the village. In contrast, the other party cadre Guo Zhenshan, who keeps talking about “Five Year Plan” and “industrialization” and encourages Kai-hsia to apply for positions in factories in the city, turns out to be a selfish person who cares only about his household’s yields. Here, Liu Qing seems to share with Zhao Shuli the belief that a “virtuous” leader should be concerned more about the local community rather than the state’s business. After all, it is for the sake of building better community that Sheng-pao and other peasants become self-conscious modern subjects capable of planning and engaging in social practice to transform the reality. The purpose of Sheng-pao’s founding of the mutual-aid team and cooperative is not to contribute to the state’s “industrialization,” but to help poor villagers survive the spring famine (because the rich peasants refuse to lend them grains). To speak of his identity, Sheng-pao, though a party member, is not really a state cadre that lives on state wages, but a local leader at the village level. Leaders of this level - the village head, chiefs of production team, head of the elementary co-operative - are not strictly affiliated with the state government, and yet are important

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 409-410.

intermediary force (or what Philip Khun calls the “middleman”) between the state and the peasant masses, and often play an ambiguous role; they could either aid the state’s extraction of villagers, or stand on the side of local community to resist the state, as I will later specify in the next section. As Cai Xiang points out, “rural cadres are not strictly categorized as state officials, and yet the state has had to rely on them to manage rural communities for those communities to function effectively within the structure of a unified nation-state.”<sup>185</sup> In fact, Cai points out, the figure of Sheng-pao actually contains some traditional virtues of leaders in rural society, such as the “willingness to give all he’s got,” and “selflessness and the sacrifice of one’s own family for the good of all families.” Such traditional virtue “was not only the Party’s expectation for its own members, but with the localization of cadres, it also represented the transformation of social functions formerly performed by the clan or family. In other words, revolutionary politics made effective use of the traditional ideal of a clan leader and transformed it into a new image of someone who leads.”<sup>186</sup> If, like Cai analyzes, local village leaders like Sheng-pao carry some traditional virtues of a patriarch, we cannot help but wonder, as a good local leader who cares so much about his village community, what would Sheng-pao do when his community is threatened by the overt extraction of the state during the Great Leap Forward? At times when interest of the co-operative conflict with the state’s interest, will Shengbao stand by the collective or by the state?

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<sup>185</sup> Cai Xiang, *Revolution and Its Narratives: China’s Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966*, trans. Rebecca Karl, Xueping Zhong (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 117.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117.



### ***“Departmentalism”: Collective versus State***

If, at the time of Zhao Shuli’s writing of *Sanliwan Village* and Liu Qing’s writing of *The Builders*, the “modernization” of “socialist state” was still compatible with the well-being of the village community which was trying to modernizing itself, then, in late 1950s and early 1960s, the state, facing the shortage of capital and driven by the need of accumulation, began to show its exploiting side. The “communization movement” (公社化) and “Great Leap Forward” in 1957 were part of the socialist state’s attempt to accelerate the accumulation by extracting resources and production means from the local co-operative.

The campaign of Great Leap Forward was launched in the end of 1957 launched “industrialization of the countryside.” Industries were lowered down to the countryside, and peasants engaged in industrial production; they were expected to utilize local material sources to develop local small industries which would produce small consumer goods for peasantry, such as fertilizers, pesticides, agricultural implements, sugar, paper, and textiles.<sup>187</sup> Besides industry, peasants were also recruited for the construction of infrastructural works such as roads, bridges and water conservation works, which required intensive cost of human power. The objective reason for the “lowering” of industry, according to Wen Tiejun, was the drastic decrease of Soviet Union’s aid of capital investment in 1957, which caused the immediate shortage of capital at the state level. The Central Government, now lacking funds to develop industry, had to rely on the fiscal power of local governments and the

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<sup>187</sup> “Guanyu renmin gongshe ruogan wenti de jueyi,” 关于人民公社若干问题的决议 (Resolution of several questions about People’s commune), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 519.

mobilization of local human power to develop industry in the countryside.<sup>188</sup> The accumulation of capital for developing local industry now was transferred to local collectives, and was obtained primarily through expropriating private-owned land and implements of peasant individuals and integrating properties of original collectives. Statistics shows that while the usual accumulation rate for public funds maintained at a stable rate between 7% and 10%,<sup>189</sup> the accumulation rate leapt to 15-20% of the total income and 25-30% of the net income in 1958.<sup>190</sup> Accordingly, the products saved for peasantry's self-consumption was drastically reduced. As a result, widespread resistance of the unified sale by peasantry occurred, mostly in the form of keeping to themselves the agricultural products which were supposed to be handed to the State and secretly dividing the products between themselves, hence causing the serious shortage of grains, oil, pork, and vegetables in 1959.<sup>191</sup> Despite the harvest of 1958, 1959 witnessed the shortage of supply of agricultural products nationwide.

With the intensifying extraction of the resources, there also appeared the tendency to merge local co-operative with the state, and the scale of the co-operative kept expanding. In the first stage (1951-1954), mutual-aid team was usually composed by about seven or eight households and "elementary co-operative" consisted of about

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<sup>188</sup> Wen, *Baci Weiji*, 71.

<sup>189</sup> Wu, Pinghan, Song Ziqin, Kong Jinliang. "Changzhi diwei shiban chuji hezuoshe de youlai, gouxian he jieguo." 长治地委试办初级农业社的由来、构想和结果 ("Experience of experiment on key agricultural co-operatives in North China"), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 96.

<sup>190</sup> "Zhongyang nongcun gongzuobu guanyu quanguo nongcun buzhang huiyi de baogao" 中央农村工作部关于全国农村部长会议的报告 (Report on national conference of rural departments by central government's department of rural work), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 526.

<sup>191</sup> "Zhengzhou huiyi jilu," 郑州会议记录 (Notes of Zhengzhou Conference), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 528-529.

twenty households.<sup>192</sup> In the sweeping wave of establishing “advanced co-ops” in 1956, “advanced co-operative” expanded to two hundred to three hundred households;<sup>193</sup> meanwhile there also appeared some “extra-large co-operatives” whose number of households reached a thousand.<sup>194</sup> In Anhui Province, the extra-large co-operatives even possessed up to 3500 households.<sup>195</sup> This “communization movement” culminated in 1958 in the highest form of People’s Commune. A “People’s Commune” consisted of about 2000 to 3000 households, and reached up to 6000 to 7000 households in sparsely populated areas.<sup>196</sup> Its boundaries were coextensive with township (xiang, 乡), the level above natural village and below county. A commune is a comprehensive organization, combining sectors of industry, agriculture, commercial exchange, education and military in one unit.<sup>197</sup> A typical commune consisted of mess hall, public kindergarten, nursing home, barber, bathhouse, and middle school, and took care of its commune members’ livelihood,

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<sup>192</sup> Wu, Pinghan, Song Ziqin, Kong Jinliang. “Changzhi diwei shiban chuji hezuoshe de youlai, gouxiang he jieguo.” 长治地委试办初级农业社的由来、构想和结果 (“Experience of experiment on key agricultural co-operatives in North China”), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 93.

<sup>193</sup> “Shengwei nongcun gongzuobu guanyu daxingshe jingying guanli zuotanhui de qingkuang baogao” 省委农村工作部关于大型社经营管理座谈会的情况报告 (Report about the management of extra-large co-operatives by rural work department of Fujian provincial party committee), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 360.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 360

<sup>195</sup> “Zhongyang nongcun gongzuobu guanyu tuishe he dashe wenti de jianbao” 中央农村工作部关于退社和大社问题的简报 (Brief report about big co-operatives and quitting co-operatives by Department of Rural Work in central committee), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 409

<sup>196</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zai nongcun jianli renmin gongshe wenti de jueyi” 中共中央关于在农村建立人民公社问题的决议 (Central party committee’s resolution on establishing People’s Commune in rural region), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 70.

<sup>197</sup> Mao Zedong, “Guanyu remin gongshe de gouxiang,” 关于人民公社的构想 (Conceptions about People’s Commune), in *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao*, vol. 7, 建国以来毛泽东文稿 (Mao Zedong’s Manuscripts after Founding of People’s Republic of China) (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1992), 317.

education, welfare, medication, and security.<sup>198</sup> Despite its similar form to Paris Commune, the People's Commune was in fact a state organ, through which the state could directly extract agricultural surplus. The administration of the township government (state officials) became the leaders of the People's Commune, and possessing the administrative power over the production activities of agricultural communes at lower level. Philip Kuhn points out, as "the chief of the collectives became the state's tax agents in the countryside," People's Commune forged "an unmediated link to the rural producers"<sup>199</sup> and was "a reliable instrument of state control below the level of the county."<sup>200</sup> To this extent, Great Leap Forward was indeed the extension of state power into the countryside to exert a total control over the rural population.

Zhao soon discovered the statist color of People's Commune and detected its potential threat to the village community. From 1959 to 1962, he wrote several articles and letters to express his concern over People's Commune. He said, the problem of People's Commune, as a state's organ, is that it was too big, and hence too "abstract" and "distant" from the actual agricultural production in the village. State cadres who were not part of the local community had no idea of the concrete conditions of production of a naturally village, and hence were not able to give accurate instructions on production or make plans. He said, "Commune cadres are mostly former cadres of township government. Cadres of this level used to represent the state and did not often participate in actual production. Hence their so-called 'leading the production' merely

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<sup>198</sup> "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zai nongcun jianli renmin gongshe wenti de jueyi," 69.

<sup>199</sup> Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State*, 110.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

consists of collecting statistics and reporting statistics, while the real practitioners are cadres of production teams. Now that these township cadres participate in the management of commune production, they tend to use the old method - convene meetings, report numbers, issue directives, approve plans, ask for statistics, and make handbooks - and they tend to think that the subordinates will always carry out their directives, without realizing that the directives are a far cry from the reality.”<sup>201</sup> He emphasized, the conditions of agricultural production in each natural village, such as its earth, water source, fertilizer source, traffic, location, terrain, etc, were concrete, material, and “historically given,” which could not be changed at will by commune leaders. Only peasants who are familiar with these historically given natural conditions can plan how to arrange labor in a reasonable way. Therefore, he suggests, production team at the level of village should be given more freedom and autonomy in production, and People’s Commune should not blindly intervene in the production activities at the local level.<sup>202</sup>

Zhao also points out another crucial characteristic that distinguishes collective economy from state ownership, which is that “collective ownership holds the highest responsibility for the production and livelihood of people within the collective.”<sup>203</sup> Since members of the agricultural cooperative live on the actual yields of the cooperative, they have a keen concern about how the collective could be better

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<sup>201</sup> Zhao Shuli, “Gei Shao Quanlin de xin,” 给邵荃麟的信 (Letter to Shao Quanlin), in *Zhao Shuli Wenji*, Volume 4 (Beijing: Zhongguo Gongren Chubanshe, 2000), 1866.

<sup>202</sup> Zhao Shuli, “Xiegei zhongyang mou fuze tongzhi de liangfengxin” 写给中央某负责同志的两封信 (Two Letters to a Comrade in Charge on Central Committee), in *Zhao Shuli Quanjì*, Volume 5 赵树理全集 (Collected Works of Zhao Shuli) (Taiyuan: Beiyue Wenyi Chubanshe, 2000), 318

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 324.

managed.<sup>204</sup> However, the Commune administration at the township level do not live on the collective's actual produce but on state's wages, and thus they concern less about the interest of the local co-operative than the fulfillment of state's task.<sup>205</sup> In order for People's Commune to better manage production, Zhao proposed that Commune should absorb able village cadres at local level into the administration leadership of the Commune, while sending township government officials down to village to participate in direct production.<sup>206</sup>

Zhao emphasized, the sense of "control over the products" was crucial for peasant's enthusiasm for production. He said: "Without the material guarantee, moral injunction alone won't work. ... If things are there and he can see it, then he is willing to endure a little bit starvation. Otherwise he is not willing to labor hard."<sup>207</sup> Therefore, Zhao proposes, at least part of the products should be kept within the community, instead of handing them entirely to the state. "In places where cadres resist the wind (of overextraction), and where people see the real effects of the co-operative, people still care for the collective. For example, a village established a tree farm, set up a school, bought a pump, and bought several mules and carts. When people see these things, they would care about the collective. Sometimes when the cart was out for five days, people would begin to concern and ask about where it has gone."<sup>208</sup> In Zhao's understanding, it is not that peasants were "selfish" and care only about their private

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<sup>204</sup> Zhao Shuli, "Gaoji nongye hezuoshe yiliu gei gongshe de jige zhuyao wenti" 高级农业合作社遗留给公社的几个主要问题, in *Zhao Shuli Quanji*, Volume 5, 318-19.

<sup>205</sup> Zhao, "Xiegei zhongyang mou fuze tongzhi de liangfengxin," 324.

<sup>206</sup> Zhao, "Gei Shao Quanlin de xin," 1867.

<sup>207</sup> Zhao Shuli, "Zai Dalian nongcun tica duanpian xiaoshuo chuanguo zuotanhui shang de fayan," 在大连农村题材短篇小说创作座谈会上的发言 (Talk at the Dalian Symposium of rural-themed fictions), in *Zhao Shuli Wenji* 赵树理文集 (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1980), Volume 4, 1713.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 1712.

business or personal interest; rather, peasants have a tendency to care for the “public interest,” when the public interest is related to his interest, for example, the collective interest of the local co-operative; but if the “public” is too far away and too abstract, such as that of the state, then they would cease to concern. Hence, Zhao suggests, state should refrain from extracting too much from the local co-operative and give more power to the co-operative.

At that time, there was a prevalent phenomenon in 1960s, called “departmentalism” (benwei zhuyi, 本位主义). This term refers to the act of placing the interest of a small group before the interest of the whole; it means putting the local before the universal, putting the part before the whole. In 1960s, this word was often used to criticize cadres who were overtly protective of their local community that it conflicted with universal interest of the state. These were often leaders of local production team at village level, who did not live on the wage of the state, but lived on the yields of local production team. In late 1950s and early 1960s, due to the shortage of food, some local cadres in the village started to resist the state’s overextraction of grains, by lying about the actual yields and secretly keeping part of the grains within the community.<sup>209</sup> In doing so, such cadres were often labelled as “departmentalism” by the Party; they are criticized as “narrow-minded” and “short-sighted” because they ignore the universal interest and focus only on the local interest of the small group of the production team or co-operative.

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<sup>209</sup> Zhao Shuli mentioned in his article that he had seen local cadres trying to conceal real number of yields from their superior in the advanced cooperative so as to keep part of the grains within the community. See Zhao, “Zai Dalian nongcun ticaì duanpian xiaoshuo chuanguozuo zuotanhui shang de fayan,” 1712.

Zhao Shuli had a sympathetic attitude towards the “provincial” behavior of local village cadres who resisted state orders and kept the grains within the community. He said: “It is natural for good cadres to ‘resist the wind.’ If the cadre is working hard and sincerely to build socialism, he always resists the wind; whether it is ‘soft resistance’ or ‘hard resistance,’ he would resist as much as he can. Whereas, some other cadres who want to show off will ‘launch the satellite’ [note: to report to the state a bigger number than actual yields].”<sup>210</sup> To Zhao Shuli, defying administrative orders from above is a natural thing for a good rural leader, “these cadres have not dissociated from the people,” because they wanted to protect the community from being over-extracted by the state.<sup>211</sup> On the other hand, cadres who unconditionally conformed to the orders of their superiors and who reported exaggerated numbers of crop yields to the State in disregard of the actual conditions of agriculture were precisely irresponsible cadres who did not truly care for the co-operative and the masses; they only concerned about fulfilling the State’s tasks for the sake of promotion by superiors.

Interestingly, Zhao Shuli’s imagination for an autonomous “commune” that was “delinked” from the state power, was manifested in his unfinished novel *Lingquan Cave* (Lingquandong, 灵泉洞) (1958), written during the Great Leap Forward. The story takes place during the Second Sino-Japanese War, but the extreme material destitution caused by the the Japanese army’s looting and Nationalist army’s levies of

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<sup>210</sup> Zhao, “Zai Dalian nongcun ticaì duanpian xiaoshuo chuanguo zuotanhui shang de fayan,” 1712.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 1715.



grains easily remind us of the situation of 1960s, when the state's over-extraction of surplus product deprived the countryside of the food resources.

In the novel, Lingquan Village suffered from the various expropriation by "village administration, county government, army, and the looting Japanese army," all of which were violence of modern state power. To escape the harsh extraction and exploitation, some villagers left the village and hid into the Lingquan Cave, and by coincidence found an underground tunnel, through which they entered the deep mountains. In the mountains, they managed to survive by collecting wild plants, hunting pheasants, and catching fish, living on the diverse plants and animals as their food resources. The cave was so big and deep that the Nationalist army could not find the underground tunnel. Hence, in an almost utopian color, Zhao depicts for us a world that is "delinked" and isolated from the warfare and brutal expropriation of state and army, a space in which the ravaged village community could be rebuilt. At the end of the novel, after figuring out a way of self-sustenance by growing their own potatoes, they returned to the village to fetch the rest of people to live with them in the mountains. In the final scene, when the villagers carried away the grains hoarded in the cellar of the runaway landlord, pooled together guns and grenades they collected on the battlefield, and militarized themselves, what we see was a "commune" in the forming, with arms, food, and people. As the local leader Golden Tiger spoke to the villagers:

"With people and weapon, our grains are sure not to be lost! Liu Chengye said I was Communist, unfortunately I am not, but I think we could 'communize' for a few days. Tonight we can first empty the cellar and move the grains to our new caves; tomorrow we will discuss with everyone in the village about

setting up a ‘big kitchen’, whoever is willing to join our ‘big kitchen’ is welcome to live with us in the cave. We can organize people who are willing to come and divide labor: some people take care of the crops we plant, some collect firewood, some stand guard, etc. We can build a wall on the side of the Old Sheep Pit, so that if any thing happens, the weak and the old can retreat and move there; the militia will guard the cave and there would be no problem. If mass army ever come, we can retreat into the Yanwangnao Cave altogether, which is a safer place!”

Someone asked: “What if tomorrow the army comes and attacks the new cave?”

“As long as we have guns and grenades, with only two persons guarding the inner cave, even a thousand people cannot take the cave!”<sup>212</sup>

It is interesting that the “big kitchen” that Golden Tiger proposed is a distinct feature of “People’s Commune” in late 1950s. On the other hand, to open up the frontier in the wilderness, to battle with the wild force of nature and obtain food source, to build up a fence and guard the property (the grains) with weapons, are typical acts of “enclosure,” the initial steps of setting up a “regime” (with army and property). In fact, this was what Communist Party had done through 1920s to 1940s – scattering in the wild mountains, setting up military bases, and combatting with the organized modern state power of Nationalist army and Japanese army; one of the most famous examples was Mao Zedong’s founding of Jinggang Mountain Base in 1927. Interestingly, the local leader Golden Tiger, was not a Communist, albeit he proposed a “communist” way of life among people – sharing together food and weapons, adopting division of labor in an egalitarian way – which are typical of a “commune.” Zhao Shuli’s intentional avoidance of the identity marker of “Communist” for Golden Tiger shows his intention to keep away from the association with the “state power,”

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<sup>212</sup> Zhao Shuli, “Lingquan Cave” 灵泉洞, in *Zhao Shuli Wenji* (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1980), Volume 2, 759-760.

because “Communist Party,” due to its intimate connection with the state regime during 1960s, have ended up being a synonym of the “state” for Zhao Shuli.

After they moved into the cave, the new type of “commune” was formed:

A big kitchen was set up in the new cave, organizing everyone in the village together. People elected Jinhu and Zhu Laibao to be the chief and deputy chief of the cave, and at the same time the chief and deputy chief of the militia. Some villagers moved into the cave, while others ate in the cave but lived in their homes in the village. Whether they were living in the cave or living at home, they all took up certain jobs. Who take care of crops, who collect firewood, who pluck wild vegetables, who grow vegetables, who cook, who ground the grains and mills powder ... all kinds of labor division, every thing was taken care of by someone. Zhang Zhaorui also asked to join; and after discussion, the people agreed to accept him, on the condition that he cannot live in the cave and can only eat in the cave. Since he didn't know how to work, people let him learn chopping woods and making fire. His wife, daughter, and daughter-in-law, also joined the sewing team.

Here, the form of organization that Zhao Shuli describes here is exactly the “People's Commune,” with the distinct features of big kitchen, public sewing group, and militia. Only it is not an organ of the state that extracts resources from peasants, but an autonomous, self-sufficient economic organization run by peasants and capable of producing its own food, guarding its fruits, and defending itself against external political forces.

Zhao's re-creation of the “people's commune” as an autonomous, self-sufficient economic and political body suggests such a possibility of “delinking” and “exodus” of labor power: in case the organized state power becomes too oppressive, there is always a way for the people to escape and delink from the state regime and reorganize themselves into new political forms to start their life anew. After all, the labor power of people is the source of creating value. Once armed and organized into a

“commune,” people can always sustain themselves by engaging in productive activities, and even have the power to combat the looting army and even the state.

What was Liu Qing’s reaction to the Great Leap Forward and the over extraction of the state, then? In 1958, roughly about the same time as Zhao Shuli’s writing of *Lingquan Cave*, Liu Qing wrote a novella called *Stubborn through Iron* (Hen tou tie, 狠透铁), describing how a retired, former chief of production team, nicknamed “Stubborn through Iron”, struggled with the corrupted production team leader, Wang Yixin, who tried to hide part of grains from the advanced cooperative. The old team leader “Stubborn” who exposed Wang’s corruption, was highly loyal to Party, always insisting on turning in all grains to the advanced cooperative (the state’s organ), and he always stood by the decision of the cooperative even if it contradicted the local interest of his village. For this reason, he was isolated and misunderstood by his fellow villagers. However, like Sheng-pao, he is portrayed as a modern subject who sticks to his faith and is determined to overcome all sorts of difficulties, enduring misunderstandings and isolation from his fellow villagers. His struggle with Wang was not driven by his love for members of the community (to the contrary, it put him in the opposite position to most members of the village), but was driven by his faith to the Party. “The old inspector was really faithful to the public and the big cooperative, even an old Catholic’s faith to God cannot match his faith.”<sup>213</sup> “All his activities were directed towards the spiritual goal of enhancing the consciousness of the masses and overcoming their backward consciousness.”<sup>214</sup> However, as far as his disregard for the

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<sup>213</sup> Liu Qing, “Hen tou tie,” 狠透铁 (Stubborn through Iron), in *Liu Qing Wenji*, vol. 4, 198.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

collective is concerned, Stubborn is very close to the kind of “statist” cadres that Zhao criticized, who chose to conform to the state’s order and disregard the actual needs of the local community.<sup>215</sup>

On the other hand, the chief of production team, Wang Yixin, seemed to have the characteristics of a “departmentalist” leader who tried to protect local interest of the production team, as he often spoke for the village and argued against his superiors at the advanced cooperative, and he even tried to hide part of the grains from the advanced cooperative by reporting false numbers, as many village leaders would do. However, Liu shows, the reason for the team leader Wang Yixin’s false report of yields and hiding the grains was “corruption.” He hid the grains not for the collective interest of the production team, but for his selfish appropriation of the collective fruit as his own. When spotted by other peasants, Wang Yixin lied to them that he was doing so for the sake of the village, to keep the good grains within the village, and to hand the bad grains to the state. His corrupted behavior thus took on the deceptive look of “protecting local interest and defying the state’s order,” and was supported by most peasants. Therefore, “Wang Yixin took advantage of the backward consciousness of the masses, making use of peasants’ selfish thoughts, departmentalism, and their indifference to the overall interest.”<sup>216</sup> In the end, not only Wang Yixin’s corruption was exposed, but his hidden class identity was revealed – he turned out to be a rich peasant who had managed to disguise himself as an upper-middle peasant during land reform. In other words, he was actually a class enemy hidden among the masses. As such, Liu re-wrote the “departmentalism” (protecting

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<sup>215</sup> Zhao, “Zai Dalian nongcun ticaì duanpian xiaoshuo chuangzuo zuotanhui shang de fayan,” 1712.

<sup>216</sup> Liu Qing, “Hen tou tie,” 198

the interest of local community) as “corruption,” and even a deliberate act of sabotage by class enemy. As the time of the story was set in 1957 when Anti-Rightist Movement was underway, Liu seems to be writing about an anti-corruption story.

As a matter of fact, “eradicating corruption” was indeed a major movement in late 1950s and early 1960s, to cope with the difficulty of extracting surplus products from the peasants. At that time, mass assemblies such as “Five-Levelled Assembly” (wuji dahui, 五级大会) (involving five levels of cadres: production group, production team, commune, county, province) and “Ten Thousand People Assembly” (wanren dahui, 万人大会) were often held around 1959 and 1960. One thing that was often done at such mass assembly was “account verification” (suan zhang, 算账). This “account verification” was done through the crosschecking of accounts between the three levels – people’s commune, production teams, and production groups - and the discordance of numbers will expose the “corruption” of cadres who tried to hide the products from the state. The account verification in Macheng County assembly revealed that corrupting behaviors were prevalent among cadres at the level of production team (village).<sup>217</sup> The “crosschecking of accounts” thus served as a powerful tool to eradicate the “corrupted cadres” (“middlemen”) between the state and the peasants, and to enhance the state’s ability of extraction.

We can see, there were two possible explanations for local cadre’s “deparmentalist” behavior of hiding products from the state. One was corruption, that is, local cadres appropriated these hidden grains as his own; the other was to protect

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<sup>217</sup> Wang Renzhong, “Wang Renzhong gei Mao Zedong de xin.” 王任重给毛泽东的信 (“Wang Renzhong’s letter to Mao Zedong”), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 547.

the collective interest of the local community from the exploitation of the state. While Zhao Shuli had a more sympathetic attitude towards “departmentalism” and adopted the second explanation, Liu Qing launched a harsh criticism of “departmentalism” and adopted the first explanation.

### ***Conclusion***

The relationship between collective interest and state interests has been a complicated question throughout the period of collectivization. While agricultural cooperative was used as a means to extract surplus product for the primitive accumulation of the state’s industrialization, the cooperative at the village level was at the same time a semi-autonomous economic organization, which, due to its ability of production for self-sustenance and expanded production, was relatively independent from the state and even formed a resisting power against the state. During the Great Leap Forward, when the state’s extraction exceeded the ability of the local co-operatives, there appeared the “departmentalism” among local leaders at the village level, who tried to keep products within the community and resisted the state’s extraction.

Zhao Shuli and Liu Qing capture the complex relationship between the collective and the state from different angles. While Zhao Shuli pictures “agricultural cooperative” as something naturally grown from within the rural society and relatively free of state’s influence, and seamlessly fuses the modern economic organization of “agricultural co-operative” with the ethical and cultural world of peasants, Liu Qing, in a praising tone of “modernization,” places the co-operative in a linear progression

towards “modernization” and situates it within the bigger picture of the state’s industrialization. Zhao’s *Sanliwan Village*, in a style that was essentially different from modern novels, shows a whole new understanding of “individual,” “marriage,” “romantic love,” “family,” which are fundamentally mediated and defined by the village community and change with the situation. Liu Qing’s *The Builders*, on the other hand, is a typical bildungsroman that feature how a peasant grows to be a modern subject of the Party. As the state’s extraction of products was intensified, Zhao and Liu’s different understanding of the commune became more manifest in their different reactions to the question of “departmentalism.” In *Lingquan Cave*, by writing about a how a ravaged village armed itself and hid into the deep mountains during Sino-Japanese War, Zhao imaginarily presented the potential scenario that peasants can organize into an independent and self-sufficient “commune” and “delink” from the state violence in extreme conditions. While Liu, on the other hand, chose to stand by the state and criticize the “departmentalism” of local village leaders, re-writing it as “corruption.”



## CHAPTER 2

### THE INDISPENSABLE AND IMPOSSIBLE FAMILY IN POST-FORDIST CHINA

#### *Dissolution of the “Common”*

The 1980s witnessed a process of “de-collectivization.” With the disintegration of the “People’s Commune”, the “household contract responsibility system” (jiating lianchan chengbao zerenzhi, 家庭联产承包责任制) was established.

According to the system, the land remains collective property of the entire village, but the production activity is “decentralized” and “individualized” to each family. Each peasant family is allotted a plot of land and is supposed to turn in the predetermined quota of agricultural product to the village administration, and keeps the rest of the products for self-consumption. The village community has the power to distribute the land according to the number of people within each family, take back the land when a person deceases or moves out of the village, and assign new land to new member of the village community, so that every member of the village is guaranteed equal share of land, with which he could sustain his life. The land, nominally a collectively-owned property, is strictly forbidden from sale by individuals on the market and can only be used, either by growing food on it, or leasing it out for cash.

At its appearance this land ownership appears to resemble the “primitive communism” that Rosa Luxemburg describes in her historical study of the German mark community, and its variants in Peru (Inca Empire), Spain, India, Russia, and South Africa. The basic characteristics of primitive communism are: the community divides land among members of the community in an egalitarian way; each family

obtains a plot of land according to its size and needs; each person not only has to live in the mark, but also has to cultivate his farm himself; whoever neglects to cultivate his portion of land over a number of years will lose it for good and the mark could hand it over to someone else to cultivate; repartitioning of the land is carried out each year, hence preventing it from forming into inheritable private property; forests, meadows, bodies of water and unused portions remained the collective property of the mark; the right to the land is exclusive to members of the community and cannot be transferred to outsiders; farm work is done communally and is mandated for the community by strict regulation.<sup>218</sup>

However, there is critical difference between the two. In “primitive communism” as described by Luxemburg, the collective had the substantial power of organizing production, for example, “the work of the members of the mark community, including farm work, remained totally communal and was mandated for the community by strict regulation.”<sup>219</sup> However, under the household contract responsibility system, the “collective” lost the substantial power of organizing production and commanding its members, reduced to a shell and the collective property became purely formal. With the allotment of land to each household, the farm work was divided and “individualized” to each single household, as well as products from the land. As a result, the collective found it more and more difficult to extract

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<sup>218</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, “The Dissolution of Primitive Communism: From the Ancient Germans and the Incas to India, Russia, and Southern Africa, from *Introduction to Political Economy*,” in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 73-75.

<sup>219</sup> Luxemburg, “The Dissolution of Primitive Communism,” 73.

products directly from the peasants for collective purpose.<sup>220</sup> While peasants still had to finish the state's assigned tasks, they now began to refuse turning in a portion of their surplus products to the collective to be used for "productive funds" and "welfare funds". Though the land was still nominally collectively owned, the collective already lost the real command over the means of production, and accordingly, the power of commanding its members. Hence, the "household contract responsibility system" was to a large extent a "personal responsibility system"<sup>221</sup>, creating the effect which amounted to the "individualization" and "de-collectivization", and hollowing out the economic base of the agricultural collective. Even the collective assets, such as machines, tractors, animals, implements, houses, were also divided and privatized. In a sense we may say, 1980s witnessed the process of "dissolution of the common."

With the dissolution of the collective economy, the collective welfare also disintegrated. First, the weak, the sick, and the aged were left unattended with the loss of the collective's redistributive function, as capable people now refused to spend their money on taking care of the weak and the old.<sup>222</sup> Instead, driven by the creed of "every man for himself", people now started to compete over the land, implements, animals, and water resources.<sup>223</sup> Secondly, the public causes previously supported by the collective funds of the cooperative, such as schools, medication, and public

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<sup>220</sup> "Bufen baokan zaiwen dui baochandaohu tichu zhiyi" 部分报刊载文对包产到户提出质疑 (Some newspaper articles raised questions about to land allotment to household), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 973

<sup>221</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 168.

<sup>222</sup> "Guanyu wending wanshan nongye shengchan zerenzhi de qingkuang," 关于稳定完善农业生产责任制的情况 (About steady and improving household contract responsibility system), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 1027.

<sup>223</sup> "Shanxi shengwei dui weinan diwei guanyu jiuzheng gebie defang huafen kouliangtian wenti de baogao de pifu" 陕西省委对渭南地委关于纠正个别地方划分"口粮田"问题的报告的批复 (Shanxi provincial party committee's reply on Weinan District party committee's report on rectifying the problems of allotment of in some places), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 940.

infrastructure, also terminated due to the shortage of collective funds and collective labor (especially as the cooperative now lost the power to command individual members). For example, in Hunan Province, unable to get their wages from the collective funds, cadres and teachers asked for their monthly rations door to door.<sup>224</sup> In Guangdong Province, while each village used to have their elementary schools, hiring teachers on the collective funds, now, with the depletion of the collective, the school teachers couldn't get paid.<sup>225</sup> As more and more peasants refused to share the cost of the collective cause of education, the cost of public education was undertaken by the few peasants who have children go to school, which caused the price to rise greatly, resulting in mass drop-out of school. In some places, up to 50% of schools were out of service due to the lack of funding or insufficient enrollment.<sup>226</sup> On the other hand, road, bridges, dam, and irrigation works, which used to be built and maintained by the collective, now either lacked maintenance and dilapidated.<sup>227</sup>

As a result, the “household contract responsibility system,” written down in law and endorsed by the state, lead to the emergence a huge class of small peasants. And

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<sup>224</sup> “Guanyu wending wanshan nongye shengchan zerenzhi de qingkuang,” 关于稳定完善农业生产责任制的情况 (About stabilizing and improving household contract responsibility system) in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 1027; “Guanyu nongcun cunzu jianshe wenti de diaocha he yantao” 关于农村村组建设问题的调查和研讨 (Investigation and discussion about party organization in village), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 1215.

<sup>225</sup> “Guandongdengsheng yixie ganbu qunzhong dui baochandaohu fentiandangan de fanying,” 广东等省一些干部群众对包产到户、分田单干的反映 (Responses by some cadres and masses to land allotment to household and individual laboring), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 970-971.

<sup>226</sup> “1982 nian baicun diaocha zonghe baogao.” 1982 年百村调查综合报告 (Comprehensive report about investigation in a hundred villages), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 1008.

<sup>227</sup> Chu Shitong, “Liaoning Yixian cunji jiti jingji shiti xianzhuang diaocha,” 辽宁义县村级集体经济实体现状调查 (Investigation report on the current condition of collective economy at village level in Yi County, Liaoning Province), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 1286.

such a rural area dominated by small holdership, became the “outside” of the capital for the sake of the later’s realization.

When I say the rural area is “outside” the capitalist sector, for one thing, I mean cash/capital is extremely lacking in rural areas. Wen Tiejun, a renown agricultural economist who had 11 years of working and living in the countryside, was the first one to bring to people’s attention the issues of “peasantry, agriculture, and rural area” (三农问题); he and his research team at Renming University have been paying attention to the complex relationship between “modernization” and Chinese peasantry. In his book *Rural China’s Centenary Reflection*, he points out that, because the highly fragmented nature of small holding economy is incompatible with capital (which is suited to socialized production), capital tends to withdraw from the small holdership. The small and fragmented cash scattered in the hands of millions of small holders cannot form into “capital” under the conditions of subsistence agriculture. And due to agriculture’s irregular nature, the capital invested in agriculture requires longer turnover, and bears higher risks, posing greater difficulty for the banks to supervise each money they loan. For example, he points out, in China, after economic reform in 1980s, commercial banks prefer to do business with the entrepreneurs with large capital and avoid dealing with small holders, because a single transaction with the former can generate a great amount of surplus value, while transaction with individual small holders is time-consuming, difficult to manage the risk, and hardly generate any profits due to the seasonal small loans.<sup>228</sup> Karl Kautsky made a similar observation of

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<sup>228</sup> Wen Tiejun, *Sannong Wenti yu Shiji Fansi*, 三农问题与世纪反思 (Rural China’s Centenary Reflection) (Beijing: Shenghuo Dushu Xinzhi Sanlian Publishing House, 2005), 118.

the incompatibility of modern financial system with small farmers in 19<sup>th</sup> Germany, “the mortgage institutions which made their living by lending ... did not want to get involved in all the trouble and expense associated with loans to small farms”, therefore, “under the mortgage system, it was the large unit which first seized the advantage of the cooperative system”, while “loans were not extended to holdings below a specified net property tax yield ... or a certain net value.”<sup>229</sup> Hence, cash in the countryside is extremely lacking, causing usury started to prevail in many rural areas.

A second aspect of being “outside” the capitalist sector is the “non-capitalist” nature of the partially “self-sustaining” subsistence agriculture, which does not rely much on cash for daily subsistence. For example, vegetables grown by the family in the courtyard are “free”; part of meat, and eggs, and milk that come from the pigs and cows fed by the family are also “free”; grains grown on their own land are also “free.”<sup>230</sup> It is very common for a Chinese peasant household to combine crops with some poultry farming, to “grow some tea on the east slope, grow some corn on the west slope, grow some vegetables in front of the door, feed a pig in the courtyard, tether a cow in the backyard.”<sup>231</sup> Hence, small holders have no problem feeding themselves. Some Chinese scholars, like He Xuefeng, terms this life as “low consumption, high welfare.”<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Karl Kaustky, *The Agrarian Question*, vol. 1 (London: Zwan Publications, 1988), 121.

<sup>230</sup> He Xuefeng, *Diquan de Luoji: Zhongguo Nongcun Tudi Zhidu xiang hechu qu* 地权的逻辑：中国农村土地制度向何处去 (The logic of land rights: where will China's rural land system go) (Beijing: Zhongguo zhengfa daxue chubanshe, 2010), 228.

<sup>231</sup> Wen, *Sannong Wenti yu Shiji Fansi*, 231.

<sup>232</sup> He Xuefeng, *Xiangcun Shehui Guanjianci: Jinru Ershiyi Shiji de Zhongguo Xiangcun Sumiao* 乡村社会关键词：进入二十一世纪的中国乡村素描 (Keywords of rural society: sketches of Chinese rural area in 21<sup>st</sup> century) (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 2010), 55.

On the other hand, however, this low-cost “welfare” in the countryside does not include medication and education. Local government which lived on the limited taxes and fees paid by the peasants simply lacked the financial ability to undertake the public welfare construction in the countryside; it became all the more difficult when the agricultural taxes and fees were altogether cancelled in 2004. Wen Tiejun also points out, with the agricultural sector providing only 17% of the gross domestic income, it is impossible for the government to use this 17% of income to take care of the social welfare of the 70% of national population (the rural population).<sup>233</sup> Therefore, their social welfare can only come from the small plot of land they possess.<sup>234</sup> This was fundamentally determined by the extreme low productivity of subsistence agriculture dominated by the mode of small holdership.

As such, with the retreat of capital from the countryside, the public welfare infrastructure is under-maintained in the countryside. High-quality education and medical resources have been increasingly informed by the logic of capital with the marketization and commercialization in the 1990s, and concentrate more and more in the “capitalist sector” and big cities, inaccessible to peasants. Lacking cash and unable to afford the expensive medical treatment in hospitals, peasants who have grave disease cannot afford to be treated in good hospitals. Good education resources, too, also tend to concentrate in the cities along with capital.

Lacking cash and good education resources, most children could not do very well in schoolwork and drop out of school at an early age; they most likely end up being a peasant like their fathers when they reach adulthood, and drift into the city

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<sup>233</sup> Wen, *Sannong Wenti yu Shiji Fansi*, 113

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-149; 113.

looking for employment as migrant worker. Hence, the countryside becomes the production site for cheap migrant labor force. Instead of being produced in the capitalist sector where the cost is high, the labor power is produced at a very low cost in the “non-capitalist” sector of subsistence agriculture, “outside” the capitalist sector. Capital in the city thus obtains the labor power basically “for free.”

If, however, a peasant family wants to change their children’s fate of being a peasant or a menial migrant worker, and to support a child to go through college, the cash expenses will be huge for them, because the “self-sustaining” mode of agriculture determines that rural sector won’t produce money. Hence, a child may be able to go to primary school in his/her own village or nearby village, for junior middle school he would have to go to the town, for junior high school he would have to go to the city, and for university, he would have to go to the capital city of a province or metropolis such as Beijing or Shanghai. For each level up the education ladder, he would have to spend more money to support his education fees and living expenses, as he approaches towards the center of capital.

Hence, because of the gap between the “capitalist” medical and educational resources and the “non-capitalist” small holdership, small holders, driven by the need to earn more cash, migrate into the city to look for supplemental employment. As such, small peasants turn into migrants. Hence, our discussion of the agrarian commune now enters the phase of its “deterritorialization.” Now the tension-ridden relationship between “commune” and “capital” shows itself on the laboring body of rural migrants.



### ***Small-Holder-Migrant and “Double Labor Market”***

“Small peasant” (with the possession of a small holding) and “migrant” seem to be a pair of contradicting concepts. However, they are perfectly combined in the post-Fordist conditions of China.

Indeed, according to some Marxist theorists, small peasant has the inherent tendency of becoming a migrant. Even in the traditional small holding economy, agricultural production is often supplemented with non-agricultural occupations, such as crafts and trades. Due to the seasonal character of agriculture, Chayanov shows, “the labor intensity curve in agriculture always shows extremely uneven development. Sowing, mowing, harvesting, and some work on specialized crops sometimes demand the exceptional accumulation of a mass of labor in insignificant time periods, while in other, sometimes very lengthy, periods of the farm year agriculture finds no objects on which to use its labor.”<sup>235</sup> Hence, labor is far from being fully utilized in agriculture. For example, in Russia, peasants spend only 25-40 percent of their labor on agriculture, and “peasant labor is far from fully used and gives a use rate not exceeding 50 percent.”<sup>236</sup> Hence, small holders often throw part of their labor into nonagricultural livelihoods for supplementary income, such as crafts and trades, which “give a considerably higher payment per labor unit.”<sup>237</sup> With the supplemental income from crafts and trades, “one may obtain earnings with less drudgery.”<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Alexander V. Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy*, ed. Daniel Thorner, Basile Kerblay, R.E.F. Smith (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, INC., 1966), 74-75.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 108

When small holders are circumscribed by capitalist conditions, the pressure for money would turn small holders from “sellers of foodstuffs” into “sellers of labor-power, and buyers of foodstuffs.”<sup>239</sup> As Kautsky observed in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, under the conditions of capitalism, small farms ended up the “production sites” of labor power for large farms. The most ideal form of wage-laborers in Germany, Kautsky points out, was the “independent” small farmers, who had their own households “on their own or rented land, devoting only part of their time to wage-labor, and the rest to working their own land.” “As cottagers their bit of cultivation does not take up all their time – and they hire themselves out as day-laborers on large farms. Or, either as cottagers or peasants, they provide a surplus of workers via their children, for whom there is no room on the family farm, and who can therefore be taken on as house-servants or day-laborers by large farms.” Other forms of employment included “Deputanten”, who “received a fixed annual wage, together with some payment in kind, a plot of land and accommodation on the large farm,” and “Instleute,” who “live on the main farm, but in their own accommodation,” receiving as remuneration “part of payment in land which they have to cultivate, part in kind, and part in wages.”<sup>240</sup>

Because large farms always rely on small farms to provide labor hands; excessive elimination of the small farms would result in shortage of labor power and thus steadily reduce the profitability of the large farms. “Clearing peasants off the land may release additional land for the large farm, but at the same time it reduces the number of people available to cultivate it. This in itself is sufficient to ensure that,

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<sup>239</sup> Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question*, vol. 1, 173.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 161-163.

despite its technical superiority, the large farm can never completely prevail within any given country. The large landowner may drive out all the free peasants from their land, but a portion of them will always celebrate their resurrection as small tenant farmers.” Hence, Kautsky observed a peculiar phenomenon in the late nineteenth century’s Germany that when large farms increased, small farms increased at an even quicker pace. “The penetration of capital can lead not to a decrease, but in fact to a marked increase in the overall number of small enterprises.”<sup>241</sup> “Far from making a rapid exit from the rural scene, small farms continue to exist.”<sup>242</sup>

Similar form of wage-worker was also found in Russia, known as the “allotment-holding wage-workers.” Lenin found that to guarantee themselves a supply of workers, the private landowners would “distribute land to the peasants on the otrabotki basis, or for a part of the crop together with otrabotki.”<sup>243</sup> The workers would work this patch of land for his own subsistence, in exchange of which he is obligated to work the land of the private landowners for free, generating some kind of “labor rent” for the private land owner. As such the corvée (otrabotki) system and the capitalist system “are interwoven in the most varied and fantastic fashion.” These Russian corvée agricultural workers, not unlike the German small farmers, are characterized by “insignificant scale of farming on a patch of land, with the farm in a state of utter ruin, inability to exist without selling labor-power, an extremely low standard of living.” Because the allotment of land served as “wages in kind” for the worker, it significantly reduced his wage, so that “the prices paid for labor are usually

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 142, 163.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>243</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia: The Process of the Formation of a Home Market for Large-Scale Industry* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1956), 200-201.

less than half those under capitalist hire.” The allotment of land to the rural worker “serve as a means of ‘guaranteeing’ the landowner a supply of cheap labor,” and therefore “is very often done in the interests of the rural employer themselves.”<sup>244</sup>

Lenin and Kautsky’s study show that small farmers already contain the innate tendency of being a “migrant” in their routinely shift between their own farm and the nearby capitalist farms, between the role of a producer and a seller of labor power. Such a potential tendency to migrate to elsewhere for supplementary employment has become “institutionalized” and “normalized” in China through the urban-rural divide and the household registration system, locking the peasants in a “permanently migrant” status.

Such rural-urban divide in China resembles what Claude Meillassoux calls the “double labor market” and “rotating migration.” Claude Meillassoux’s study of colonial capitalism shows, it is in the interest of capitalism to create a “double labor market,” which divides the proletariat into “workers who are integrated (or stabilized) and who reproduce wholly within the capitalist sector” and “migrants who only partly reproduce themselves within it,”<sup>245</sup> whereby the cost of production of labor power is externalized to the rural area, keeping the cost at minimum level.

The value of labor power usually consists of three parts, Meillassoux says, the first is “sustenance of the workers during periods of employment (i.e. reconstitution of labor power),” the second is “maintenance during periods of unemployment (due to stoppages, ill-health, etc.),” and the third is “replacement by the breeding of

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 178, 179, 200, 204, 205.

<sup>245</sup> Claude Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 120.

offspring.” The direct hourly wage under the contractual relationship “only pays for the labor power expended during the period of work” and “does not take account of unemployment and illness.” In other words, this “direct wage” does not cover laborer’s maintenance and reproduction. On the other hand, the fees that cover the “maintenance” and “replacement” of labor power are “indirect wage”, which keeps the laborer alive even when he/she is incapable of working (childhood, sick, retirement). The indirect wage “represents the share of the social product necessary to maintain and reproduce the labor-power at the level of the nation as a whole” and is “redistributed through a socialized institution”, which is often the state’s welfare system. “It is ... due to the payment of an indirect wage or to fringe benefits, and not simply to the purchase of immediate labor-power through wages, that labor-power is paid at its cost and reproduced.”<sup>246</sup> While citizen workers, who are fully integrated in the capitalist sector, are entitled to both “direct wage” and “indirect wage”, migrant workers only have “direct wage.”

Together with this double labor market is the mechanism of “rotating migration”, by which migrating peasants in the city are periodically discharged back to the domestic sector. Meillassoux analyzes, when the peasant is engaged in both the self-sustaining agriculture and the paid employment in the capitalist sector, he not only generates “surplus value”, but also generates “labor rent”, because he “divides his productive time between the self-sustaining activities necessary to support himself and his replacements, on the one hand, and the work carried out without return for a third

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 101, 103.

party on the other.”<sup>247</sup> For a migrant who is brought up in the non-capitalist sector, it is the domestic community and his kin who provide “the subsistence goods and care ... by breeding him as a producer of labor-power”, and taking care of him when he lost the laboring capability (ill or retired).<sup>248</sup> As such, when he drifts into the city to work for capital, he contributes to capitalist not only the “surplus value” during his working time, but also “labor rent” (during the time when he is a child and after his retirement).

For this reason, imperialism deliberately preserved the subsistence rural economy in the colonies rather than destroy it. In colonial Africa, the sector of subsistence agriculture existed alongside the capitalist industrial sector, and the colonial authority tried to keep the worker from settling down in the capitalist sector. British colonial authority stated that “native laborers should be encouraged to return to their homes after the completion of the ordinary period of service. The maintenance of the system under which the mines are able to obtain unskilled labour at a rate less than ordinarily paid in industry depends upon this, for otherwise the subsidiary means of subsistence would disappear and the labour would tend to become a permanent resident upon the Witwatersrand, with increased requirements.” In Uganda, “it is policy whenever practicable to leave the care of the destitute and the disabled in the hands of the tribal clan and family organization which have traditionally accepted this responsibility.”<sup>249</sup>

On the other hand, Meillassoux shows, colonial authority sought actively to preserve the pre-modern community in rural areas and “block the growth of private

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 111

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 117, 118.

landed property and the formation of capitalist relations of production.” They adopted a land system that was to some extent similar to China’s “household contract responsibility system,” assigning to “each family ... a plot of land to live on - one man one plot. These plots are subject to rigorous restrictions; they cannot be sold, which prevents their concentration in the hands of a local class of landowners, and it is forbidden to employ paid labour on them or to undertake cash cropping.”<sup>250</sup> The point is “to preserve an area in which labour-power can reproduce itself, but strictly at subsistence level.” The “land reserves” hence “are really reserves of labor.”<sup>251</sup>

In China, “double labor market” and “rotating migration” is created by the mutually excluded urban and rural residence registration system, turning the countryside into the “production sites of labor power.” Dorothy Solinger points out, under planned economy, the urban citizens were living under the “urban public goods regime”, entitled to the exclusive benefits of “administratively allocated, guaranteed jobs, underpriced and highly accessible transportation and water, cheap food and electricity available at stable cost,” as well as “law and order, full employment, low-cost utilities, and price stability.”<sup>252</sup> Whereas, rural dwellers were excluded from such benefits. Because peasant workers do not require urban welfare benefits, urban enterprises had always wanted to hire peasant laborers, despite the mandate from the state that the enterprise should give priority to local urban citizens. When the industrialization begun in 1952, “the heavy pressure the plan placed on enterprise managers to meet output quotas while keeping down costs led many of them to

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 117, 119.

<sup>252</sup> Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China*, 102.

circumvent their local labor bureaus by recruiting in the countryside for low-paid, temporary peasant workers.” In 1954 there were nearly two and a half million people hired in the cities, of whom as many as 70 percent were peasants. Up till 1956, there had always been “technically illicit, pejorative titled ‘black’ labor markets, mediated by ‘black labor bosses,’ offered the migrants an informal opportunity.”<sup>253</sup> Then in 1957, peasants were legally allowed to work temporarily in the city, on several conditions. “To engage temporary laborers from the rural areas, firms in the cities needed to acquire a letter of introduction from the rural labor departments, and also obtain approval from the county and township governments in that locality. The hiring was to be done in the main by contracting for the workers in groups with the rural cooperatives that employed them. In addition, urban educational, labor, or public securities had to issue a certificate approving the move.” This then was the birth of “labor contract system”, under which peasant workers “were paid at a lower rate than the regular workers, got fewer, if any benefits, and had to hand over a part of their wages to the rural cooperative (and later the commune) to which they belonged.”<sup>254</sup> Hence, migrant peasant workers developed from “contract workers” in earlier period, whose price had been kept at a lower level than urban laborers. Starting from 1980s, there emerged in China a huge “floating population”, who had their permanent residence registered in the countryside, while working in the city as wage-earners. Numerous studies have also illustrated the bad working conditions, low wages, and the

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 38-40

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 40



precarious employment conditions of peasant workers.<sup>255</sup> Their jobs were mostly low-pay, temporary, unstable, short-term, and insecure, outside the social welfare system, concentrating in construction, manufacturing, nurse-maiding, marketing and services, cottage-style garment processing, and begging and scrap collecting.<sup>256</sup> Another investigation report shows that most jobs that peasant workers did in 1990s were vendors, craftsmen (shoemakers, tinsmith, locksmith), butchers, cleaners, janitors, maids, waitress, wage-workers at the foreign-invested textile factories, scrap collecting.<sup>257</sup> Unlike the stable and guaranteed jobs under the socialist welfare state system, these jobs were largely “informal” economy, which were “insecure” and “flexible.”

They not only live on wages significantly lower than normal workers, but also, by working in the city and living in the countryside, they generate a part of “labor rent” by providing for their own subsistence, as analyzed by Meillassoux. Solinger shows, in 1983 when the Chinese state just began to permit peasants to look for employment in the city, peasant migrants were expected to carry their own rations of food into the city. As of 1989, over 50 percent of the migrants in the Shanghai suburbs were still getting grain from their friends and families at home.<sup>258</sup>

The reason they are eager to work in the city even when they are given much lower wages than urban laborers is because the gap between a “capitalist” sector and

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<sup>255</sup> See Pun Ngai, Lu Huilin, Zhang Huipeng, *Dagongdi: Jianzhuye Nongmingong de Shengcun Tujing* 大工地：建筑业农工民的生存图景 (Big construction site: the living condition of construction workers) (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2012); *China On Strike: Narratives of Workers' Resistance*, ed. Hao Ren, Zhongjin Li, Eli Friedman (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2016).

<sup>256</sup> Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China*, 206.

<sup>257</sup> Ge Xiangxian, Qu Weiying, *Zhongguo Mingongchao: Mangliu Zhenxianglu* 中国民工潮：盲流真相录 (Chinese peasant workers waves: the truth of “blind flow”) (Beijing: Zhongguo guoji guangbo chubanshe, 1990), 71, 174.

<sup>258</sup> Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China*, 186

“non-capitalist” sector. As Meillassoux illustrates, “because its means of production are much more efficient, the capitalist industrial sector is able to offer a wage whose purchasing power is superior to the market value of goods produced in the domestic sector in the same length of time. To attract the rural laborers it is enough to offer a wage which partially reflects the difference in productivity between the two sectors. Provided the wage is less than the average price of labor-power in the capitalist market, then both labor-rent and surplus value will be realized.”<sup>259</sup> Because the peasants come from “outside” the capital, from the “non-capitalist” sector of subsistence agriculture which is extremely lacking capital and cash, therefore, even if the wage is lower than that of urban citizens, it is still high enough to include both labor rent and surplus value. In other words, it is an effect of the “border.” Therefore, peasants’ migration into the city have never stopped.

The population of rural migrants that flow into the city went through a drastic increase after 1990s. According to the statistics of national rural population investigation, from 1996 to 2006, the outgoing rural migrants increased from 34,000,000 to 132,120,000, increasing by nearly one hundred over the ten years.<sup>260</sup>

The astonishing mass exodus of peasants was described in a letter to the Premier of the State Council, written in the year 2000 by a local township cadre, Li Changping, of Jianli County, Hubei Province:

Since spring, all of our peasants have escaped. Day and night for the past twenty days, the ‘East Wind’ trucks, loaded with peasants, were heading towards cities all over the country. Our town has 40000 people, among them

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<sup>259</sup> Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal and Money*, 128.

<sup>260</sup> Chen Xiwen, Zhao Yang, Luo Dan, *Zhongguo Nongcun Gaige Sanshinian Huigu yu Zhanwang* 中国农村改革三十年回顾与展望 (Thirty years of Chinese rural reform: review and prospect) (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2008), 197.

18000 are laborers. Now there are 25000 out for employment, among them 15000 are laborers. This year, the outflow of population has new characteristics compared to the past. The first characteristic is 'blind flow.' In the past, people flowed out with purpose; this year, most peasants went out merely to try their luck, and even have determined to 'die in the city and never come back.' The second characteristic is the sheer number of population and of laborers is huge. In the past, people who went out were mostly girls and some surplus labor; this year, men or women, young or old, all went out. The third characteristic is many fields have been deserted. In the past, people would transfer their land to others before they leave; this year, they simply abandoned it. The number of outflow population is still rising. The deserted fields and waters in this town is estimated to be 35000 *mou* this year, which are up to 65% of the entire fields and waters in this town. ... The wasteland this year is estimated to be more than 20000 *mou*.<sup>261</sup>

And according to Li, the fundamental reason for this, was the striking gap of income between agricultural sector and the urban sector, which, was mainly caused by the taxes and fees charged to the peasants charged by local township and county government, who, after the devolution of power to local government, had to live on the fees and taxes it extracted from peasants for its cost of administrative operation. Li's letter to Premier Wen Jiabao, causing a sensation at that time, brought to people's attention the severe problem of heavy burden of peasants; taking his letter seriously, the central government cancelled the agricultural tax (at the state level) and the fees (at county level and township level) altogether in 2006. However, Li's observation was not entirely correct, for burden was not the fundamental cause of peasants' outflow; after the taxes and fees were cancelled in 2006, the outflow of peasants into the city continued to increase. The fundamental reason, in fact, was the uneven distribution of capital in the city and the countryside, which formed a border, driving the labor force

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<sup>261</sup> Li Changping, *Wo xiang Zongli Shuoshihua* 我向总理说实话 (I spoke the truth to the Premier) (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 2002), 20.

to flee from the rural sector where capital is extremely lacking and to the industrial center where capital abounds.

Now, the question is: how does the state prevent the migrant peasants from settling down permanently in the city and forming “slums” as often seen in some developing countries? How does the state make sure the migrating peasants are willing to retain the other half of their identity as small producers and willing to return to the countryside? This is where the “household contract responsibility system” plays the important role.

### ***The Indispensable and Impossible Family***

The institutional design of “household contract responsibility system” functions to “fix” peasants to the land. As long as peasant retains his permanent residence registration in the countryside, as long as he remains a member of the village community, he has the right to possess a small plot of land, from which he obtains supplemental income. However, as soon as he changes his permanent residence registration into urban citizen and ceases to be a member of the village community, he would lose the possession of the small land, which is then taken back by village community and re-distributed to others. In other words, the right to a plot of land is reserved exclusively to members of the village community, that is, those who retain their residency in the countryside. The “household contract responsibility system”, thus, is part and parcel of the “bordering” apparatus that makes urban and rural citizenship mutually exclusive. On the other hand, the plot of land also functions as

safety valve that guarantees the stability of the countryside; it enables peasants at least to feed themselves even if they don't have jobs.

Moreover, this design helps reduce the cost of labor power of the migrant worker. The possession of the small plot of land, though does not generate much income in terms of cash, can nevertheless substantially contribute to the overall income of the family, because most things can be obtained “for free” in the partially self-sufficient subsistence agriculture. Hence, if they are not completely integrated and stabilized in the city, peasants who migrate into the city would rather retain their permanent residence registration in the countryside, and would ask their family or relations to work the land. That is, they are willing to keep their identity as “migrant”, and remain excluded from the urban welfare benefits, including the medical and education resources, for the use of which they would have to pay extra fees.

In fact, the level of wage income of migrant workers in the city is calibrated and kept at such a level so as to make sure that, when combined with the agricultural income from the land, it is just sufficient to maintain the reproduction of the entire family in the countryside. According to He Xuefeng, only by combining the wages in the city and produce from the land can the Chinese peasants maintain the reproduction of the family as whole. Under current income structure, the produce from the land will sustain the daily expenses for the family in the countryside, while the cash income sent back by the male family member working in the city can be saved and used for big expenditure such as house-building and education.<sup>262</sup> According to He Xuefeng's

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<sup>262</sup> He, *Xiangcun Shehui Guanjianci*, 3.

calculation, as of 2006, for a normal peasant family that possesses 10 *mou* of land,<sup>263</sup> the cash input for each *mou* (for the expenditures on fertilizer, seeds, insecticide, watering service, mechanics and cropping) would be no more than 500 yuan, and the cash earned from each *mou* would be 1000 yuan if weather is good, then 10 *mou* will generate 10,000 yuan cash earnings for the family. Besides, the family will usually grow some vegetables in the courtyard, breed some pigs, breed fish or shrimps in the pond, which could be used for the family's consumption or to be exchanged for cash. As such, with the aged parents doing the agricultural work in the countryside, the family will earn an extra 10,000 yuan per year from the migrating members working in the city. Such level of income is good enough to support a relatively well-off life for a family of 5 or 6 people (including three generations, aged parents, adult couples, and their children), enabling them to have some extra savings.<sup>264</sup> However, if the family move into the city, lacking the "free" resources in the countryside, the living expense will soar drastically, because everything would now cost money, and the aged parents and children, not qualified as "wage laborer" for proper employment in the city, would turn into pure "consumers" instead of producing any value for the family, whereas the adult couple become the only wage-earners. Such a family will be unable to reproduce themselves in the city.<sup>265</sup> Hence, "entirely abandoning the management of the land will greatly increase the cash expenses of the peasant family, which cannot be compensated by the seemingly 'affluent' wages earned in the city."<sup>266</sup> Kautsky has illustrated the similar condition for German small farmers: "Consider the situation of a

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<sup>263</sup> 1 *mou* is roughly about 0.165 acre.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 48

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>266</sup> He, *Diquan de Luoji*, 237

small peasant family earning 400 Marks, paying no rent, and producing the bulk of their own food - and living quite adequately. An accident propels them into the proletariat, necessitating a move to the town, where a job turns up paying 800 Marks a year. The peasant's income has doubled, but the family's true situation may have worsened. Rent now has to be paid, and possibly a daily rail journey to and from work has to be financed. Milk, eggs, vegetables, and pork, which once cost nothing, are now expensive items. The children can no longer run around barefoot, and the poorer hygienic conditions mean higher outgoings on doctors and medicines.” Kautsky points out, as far as income tax is concerned, even though this individual is now twice as well off as before, their situation is actually worsened.<sup>267</sup> For this reason, keeping the plot of land and his family in the countryside is the most rational choice for a Chinese migrant who cannot stabilize in the city.

As the family have to live in the countryside, their children to a large extent might be raised by the aged grandparent in the countryside, where, thanks to the subsistence agriculture, the cost of raising a child is significantly lower than in the city. As pointed out above, children living in the “non-capitalist” sector of countryside only have access to low-quality education and medical resources, and would mostly likely end up a migrant worker like their fathers. If, however, the migrants choose to bring their children with them to drift in the city, the child will still be excluded from the urban welfare system (such as good public schools), and have to pay extra fees for public schools or hospitals in the city, which is a large sum of money.<sup>268</sup> Most often, they would go to temporary private schools, whose teaching quality is significantly

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<sup>267</sup> Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question*, vol. 1, 140-141

<sup>268</sup> He, *Diquan de Luoji*, 261.

lower than public schools. And even if the children receive education in the city, by law they are required to return to their place of permanent residence (countryside) to attend high school entrance examination and college entrance examination. Hence, many children would go back to their countryside to attend middle school. Besides, since the migrants change their temporary jobs from place to place, their children will often frequently transfer between different temporary schools.<sup>269</sup> At any rate, the children of migrants are in a situation as precarious and unstable as their parents. For reasons above, the reproduction of the migrant's family is done in the countryside, in the "non-capitalist" sector of subsistence agriculture, undertaken by his family members.

Hence, there is an interesting phenomenon of contemporary Chinese small holders, which is the tendency toward "familization". While in the 1980s, the division of agricultural and non-agricultural work took place between different time periods within one year, that is, peasants spend part of their time working in the fields and spend part of their time working in the nearby town, where numerous township enterprises were available. Starting from 1990s and up to this day, the division of agricultural labor and non-agricultural labor tends to take place more and more within one family, between different generations; that is, aged parents stay in the countryside to work the land, while young couples work in the city, or the husband working in the city while wife staying in the countryside.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Lü Tu, *Zhongguo Xingongren: Mishi yu Jueqi* 中国新工人：迷失与崛起 (China's new workers: lost and rise) (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 2013), 63.

<sup>270</sup> He, *Diquan de Luoji*, 36



Now, the prevailing economic structure of Chinese small holders tends to be half-agriculture, half-wage-labor. Very few peasant families get their income solely from agricultural production. Most families divide labor within one family, with some of its members working in the city as wage-earners, and other members working the land in the countryside. Usually, to ensure the maximum income for the entire family, the pattern is to leave agricultural work to the physically weak members in the family. “The best labour-power in the family takes up wage-labour, ...(while) labour on the small lot is increasingly delegated to the women, small children and, possibly, elderly invalids. The father and more grown-up children have to go out and ‘earn.’”<sup>271</sup> It is “small peasants” and “migrant workers” combined in the single economic unit of family.

Interestingly, what connects the agricultural “outside” and the capitalist “inside” together is family, an institution that is well known for the great amount of “unpaid labor” in reproducing labor power. In fact, it is no coincidence that the “household contract responsibility system” takes family to be a basic economic unit. Silvia Federici points out, “the family emerges in the period of primitive accumulation as the most important institution for the appropriation and concealment of women’s labor.”<sup>272</sup> Federici reveals a crucial dimension of capital’s primitive accumulation that Marx failed to explore, that is, the “enclosure” of women’s bodies and their reproductive labor. She says, the unpaid domestic labor of women in the house “have

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<sup>271</sup> Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question*, vol. 1, 172.

<sup>272</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 97.

enabled capitalism to immensely expand the ‘unpaid part of the working day.’”<sup>273</sup> For example, the “unpaid labor” within family was very important to male cottage workers in the putting-out system, “for a wife could ‘help’ them with the work they would do for the merchants, while caring for their physical needs, and providing them with children, who from an early age could be employed at the loom or in some subsidiary occupation.”<sup>274</sup> For this reason, “even in times of population decline, cottage workers apparently continued to multiply.”<sup>275</sup>

Another crucial aspect of family’s unpaid labor is the parental labor of bringing up a child. Meillassoux points out, family is “the institution within which birth, nurture and education of children take place thanks to the largely unpaid labor of parents, particularly of the mother. It remains the locus of the production and reproduction of labor-power.” There are no clauses that binds the parties in respect to hours of work, distribution of household tasks or payment for them. “The work which the wife puts into producing the child – a future producer – is never paid for in wage terms, that is, in terms of the time effectively spent on production.” Despite the immense labor put into raising the child, he/she grows up to be the labor commodity on the labor market that cannot be sold by their parents, because “the age of consent releases the child from all obligations to his parents practically as soon as he reaches productive age. Legally, therefore, his labor power can only be exploited by those who own the capitalist means of production and are in a position to offer him a job. The cost of ‘manufacturing’ a producer is never accounted for in capitalist terms, neither as

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 115.

a private investment, nor as a product which brings the producer of the producer a profit in interest or by sale.”<sup>276</sup> In this light, family functions as the “outside”, the “non-capitalist” sphere within a bourgeois society, providing something “for free.” “The capitalist mode of production depends upon an institution which is alien to it”, which is the family, “on account of its capacity for utilizing unpaid – particularly female – labour, and by exploiting the emotional attachment which still dominates parent-child relations.”<sup>277</sup>

What Meillassoux and Federici analyze are the “unwaged work” within bourgeois family. However, family has even more significant important in the peculiar form of production of small holdership.

### ***Family in Small Holdership: Unremunerated Labor***

Russian economist Alexander V. Chayanov points out, an outstanding characteristic that distinguishes “family farm” from “capitalist farm” is the lack of the category of “wages.” For capitalist farm, the net profit is the amount left after the deduction from the gross income of the expenditures on materials and wages paid to the labor hands. However, family labor farm, when calculating income, do not take the price of their own labor into calculation; to them, the income is the amount of product left after the deduction of the expenditure on materials from the gross income.<sup>278</sup> In other words, “there is no social phenomenon of wages.”<sup>279</sup> Karl Kautsky also points out: “agricultural labor for the families’ own consumption is not calculated as an

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<sup>276</sup> Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal and Money*, 141-142.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>278</sup> Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy*, 86.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 5.

expenditure; it does not cost anything. Everything which cultivating the soil contributes to the household therefore appears as pure gain. Not only is it virtually impossible to calculate the money value of the yield, and divide it into wages, interest and ground-rent: such a calculation would never be undertaken since money plays no role in this type of farming.”<sup>280</sup> This “lack” of wages derives from the fact that small holding economy is a self-sufficient mode of production, in which production and consumption are combined together as an undivided whole. However, the problem is, when such small peasant farm is circumscribed by capitalist economy and is articulated with the capitalist mode of production in a certain way, the labor on family farm can very easily turn into “unwaged work” and become the object of exploitation for capitalist accumulation.

Another characteristic of family labor farm is that it cannot “lay off” labor hands at will like capitalist farms do, but must keep them fed under whatever circumstances. Since the “labor” is a fixed element that could not be changed, all the other elements of production (land, means of production) must be deployed around this fixed element and must optimize the effective use of “labor hands.” As Chayanov illustrates, “in the scheme of the harmoniously developed organic elements of the labor farm undertaking, the labor force of the family is *something given*, and the farm’s production elements are fixed in accordance with it in the technical harmony usual *among them*.”<sup>281</sup> Hence, while capitalist farm takes as its central concern the pursuit of profit and does not concern much about labor hands (which it can lay off at will according to capital’s needs), the family labor farm takes as its central concern the maximum employment of

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<sup>280</sup> Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question*, 170-171.

<sup>281</sup> Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy*, 92.

family members. Especially, in the circumstance of insufficient land or cash and in the circumstance of lacking other employment opportunities, that is, when the family's labor force is in an under-employed state, the family will nevertheless seek to expand the volume of its economic activity even within the limited resources of agricultural production that it "violate(s) the optimal combination of production elements for its activity." In other words, it displays the tendency for "intensification of labor" (or "self-exploitation") for the purpose of maximizing the gross income for the entire family, even if this is done at the cost of declined return per labor unit. "Inevitably losing on unit labor payment, it nevertheless considerably expands the gross income of its agricultural undertaking."<sup>282</sup> "This forcing up of labor intensity, buying increased annual agricultural income at a price of reducing labor unit payment, is achieved either by an intensification of work methods or by using more labor-intensive crops and jobs."<sup>283</sup> For example, Philip Huang's study of Chinese family labor farms in the Yangzi Delta through 1350 to 1988 reveals that, due to the greater pressure on the land posed by growing population, peasant families in the Yangzi Delta in Ming and Qing Dynasty increasingly switched to growing labor-intensive commercial crops such as cotton and mulberries (for silk). By putting greater use of labor onto the land, they achieved higher total values of output per unit land, but they got lower average returns per labor day. As such, we can see, the intensification of labor is in essence the "devaluation" of labor, and leads ultimately to increasingly amount of "unremunerated labor" in agricultural practices, which frequently happens in densely-populated area, such as China.

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 113

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 113

A third characteristic of family farm is, “family” is good at utilizing the “spared” and “auxiliary” labor of women, children, and the old people, who are not qualified as “wage-laborers” on the capitalist labor market. For this reason, family as a work unit is particularly adapted to the elastic and irregular nature of agricultural activities. It is very common for a Chinese peasant household to “grow some tea on the east slope, grow some corn on the west slope, grow some vegetables in front of the door, feed a pig in the courtyard, tether a cow in the backyard.”<sup>284</sup> He Xuefeng points out, “in the countryside, old people do not have the concept of ‘retirement’, even if they are over sixty, as long as they could move, they will manage to do some work around the house. The children can also do some minor jobs such as feeding the chickens or feeding pigs.”<sup>285</sup> These trivial activities of feeding cows, feeding pigs, working the land, growing vegetables in the yards, won’t take up much physical energy, yet they constitute substantial part of agricultural activities and contribute substantially to the family’s income by providing “free” milk, eggs, fish, and meat, constituting part of the actual wages of the migrant workers and hence significantly reduces the price of Chinese migrant workers in the city. Just like Russia’s allotment of land to agricultural workers served as “wages in kind” and brought the workers’ prices down to less than half wage workers under capitalist hire, the supplementary income from the small plot of land significantly reduces the price of Chinese migrant workers in the city.<sup>286</sup>

Of course, these agricultural products are not truly “free” in the real sense; they are in essence the result of the “unremunerated labor” of women, children, and aged

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<sup>284</sup> Wen, *Sannong Wenti yu Shiji Fansi*, 231.

<sup>285</sup> He, *Diquan de Luoji*, 229.

<sup>286</sup> Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, 204.

parents within the family. However, their cost of labor is hard to calculate in terms of wages. As Wen Tiejun asks: when the old mother, after washing the wok, uses the waste water to cook some grain husks to feed the pigs, does this count as “production” or “consumption”? When a child after school picks some grass on his way home and uses it to feed the pigs, does that count as production?<sup>287</sup> Under such circumstances when production and consumption are combined together, the cost of labor is hard to calculate. Besides, these “half-laborers” can endure much lower wages than standard wage laborers, because they cannot be “laid off.” For this reason, family farm “easily outcompeted the wage labor-based managerial organization,”<sup>288</sup> because while “managerial enterprises had to rely mainly on adult and male labor paid at prevailing market wages,”<sup>289</sup> the family farms are able to draw on the much cheaper auxiliary labor of women and the old and young, which made family farms “a lower-cost form of labor organization.”<sup>290</sup>

These characteristics summarized above – the lack of “wage” category in calculating income, intensification of labor at the cost of the declining income per labor unit, the use of the “spare-time” and “auxiliary” labor of the half-laborers within the family – all come down to the central character of family, the “unwaged labor.”

I would like to propose a fourth dimension, that this “unwaged labor” operates along the logic of “love”, which, as a “non-capitalist” sphere, can also turns into a device for capitalist accumulation. Gavin Walker points out, “Capital, in order to

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<sup>287</sup> Wen, *Sannong Wenti yu Shiji Fansi*, 233.

<sup>288</sup> Philip C. C. Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 74.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

undertake its own supposed ‘rational’ and directly economic production cycle, ... requires something given, a social gift at its core,” that is, it needs to have the two elements land (raw material) and population (labor power) readily available, and it is through the “nationalist sentiment” that the two elements could be obtained for free, as a “gift”, without paying price. Likewise, in the case of family, the unconditional love to support one’s family acts as a device to extract the unpaid labor which accrues to the gains of capital. Out of love, aged parents would continue to work into their very old age in the countryside to create supplementary income out of the land, or raising their grandchild for their migrant children. In fact, the economic exploitation of aged parents in some areas were exceedingly heavy in some parts of China. While parents put their life-time savings into their children’s marriage and building house for them, when they lose labor capacity, what they get from children are only minimum means of subsistence, such as about 300 catties of grains each year, some heating materials, and a few notes each month for consumption; they were able to subsist, but barely have any access to cash.<sup>291</sup> More importantly, “love” also drives the people to maintain the integral structure of “family” across the huge gap between capitalist and non-capitalist sector, over the long distance between the coastal province and inland province, therefore keeping the peasant migrant in a “permanent migrant” status.

Historically, due to its capacity to bear the almost infinite “intensification of labor”, small family farms have better capacity to endure higher rents or higher land price than large capitalist farms, because for them “land is not a means of producing a

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<sup>291</sup> He, *Xiangcun Shehui Guanjianci*, 114.



profit or ground-rent, but for providing ... the means for the peasant's existence.”<sup>292</sup>

As Philip Huang demonstrates, in Ming and Qing period, there was a tendency of “familization of rural production” when the growing population was putting more pressure on the land in the Yangzi Delta. Family farm “easily outcompeted the wage labor-based managerial organization,”<sup>293</sup> because the family farms were able to draw on the much cheaper auxiliary labor of women and the old and young, while “managerial enterprises had to rely mainly on adult and male labor paid at prevailing market wages.”<sup>294</sup> Therefore, family farm became “a lower-cost form of labor organization.”<sup>295</sup> They did so mainly through their self-exploitation. Kautsky shows us a miserable picture of how overwork and under-consumption drove German small cultivators “down to the level of beasts of burden, into a life occupied by nothing other than work – apart from time set aside for sleeping and eating.”<sup>296</sup> Whereas, in France, “the small-holding property ... has transformed the mass of the French nation into troglodytes. Sixteen million peasants (including women and children) dwell in hovels, a large number of which have put one opening, others only two and the most favored only three.”<sup>297</sup> Besides, small farmers “not only flog themselves into this drudgery” but also exploit their family members. “The need to exploit family members as young as is feasible, and as productively as is possible” compelled the parents to make their children quit school at an early age, to the extent that in Austria and Bavaria, compulsory school attendance is only 12% or 13%. The small family farms competed

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<sup>292</sup> Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question*, 170.

<sup>293</sup> Huang, *The Peasant Family in the Yangzi Delta*, 74.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>296</sup> Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question*, 111.

<sup>297</sup> Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 481.

with the capitalist farms through “the dirtiest and most degrading misery”, turning themselves into “a class of barbarians standing half outside the society.”<sup>298</sup>

Besides, “family” also proves to be the most tenacious and elastic form of economic organization that suits well with the flexible and fluctuating conditions of post-Fordist capitalism. Because of “love”, a peasant worker may be “laid off” by the factory, but he cannot be “laid off” by his family. When a peasant migrant is laid off by the factory and discharged back to the rural sector, he will nevertheless be supported by his family, who, through the ceaseless intensification of labor input onto the small plot of land, will keep him alive. Hence, the “household contract responsibility system” generates a huge army of cheap, flexible, and disposable migrant labor force. Not only factories in the city need not undertake the responsibility for workers’ livelihood, but also, the wage of the worker need not cover the expenses of the entire family as such cost is outsourced to the countryside. This is why the phenomena of left-behind children, empty-nest elderly, and separated couples were so prevalent. With the small plot of land at home, the peasant worker turn into what David Harvey terms as “disposable workers” in the city, which do not rely on the social welfare or job security provided by the capitalist sector in the city, and can be discharged at will back to the countryside, suiting the need of the precarious and highly flexible post-Fordist economy. For example, when financial crisis struck China in 2008 and shut down masses of manufacturing factories, the migrant workers can return to their home in the countryside, stay there, and “wait out” the crisis, until the

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<sup>298</sup> Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question*, 110-111.

improved economic conditions allow them to go out to work in the city again.<sup>299</sup> That was the secret of how China can still remain politically and economically stable, because peasants have land to return to. For this reason, some Chinese scholars oppose to “capitalizing” the land, and insist that the small holdership be preserved, because it would serve as the “reservoir” and “buffer” for the flexible and fluctuating post-Fordist capitalism in China.<sup>300</sup>

For all these reasons, the small holder family is both “indispensable” and “impossible.” It is necessary to maintain the integrity of the family as an economic unit, because the reproduction of the family is predicated upon the combining both the agricultural income from the land and the wage income from the city together. At the same time, family is “impossible” because it straddles across the divided between the urban and the rural area, between the industrial sector and agricultural sector. The integrity of the family is founded on the long-term separation of family members (reunited only once a year) and the immense labor input of the migrant on running back and forth between the countryside and the city. The family is inherently and structurally divided; in essence, it is precarious and unstable.

Besides, the integrity of family labor is based on the assumption that laborers are always “healthy” and “functional”; it requires ceaseless input of labor power, that young migrant workers never get ill in the city, and that old people in the countryside are physically capable of fulfilling their assigned tasks of doing agricultural labor and raising grandchildren, contributing economically to the house. Such economic structure never takes into consideration that the bearer of the labor power, the

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<sup>299</sup> He, *Diquan de Luoji*, 314

<sup>300</sup> He, *Xiangcun Shehui Guanjianci*, 55; *Diquan de Luoji*, 254, 311.

laborer's bodies might get sick or lose their capacity to work due to old age. When laborers fall ill, the economic structure of the half-migrant, half-small-holder family will lose balance, and the precarious unit of family will fall apart. As a result, family, as an institution that carries out labor reproduction for capitalism, is now facing the crisis of disintegration, to the point that family may lose its most basic function – the production and reproduction of labor power. What follows, naturally, is the termination of labor power itself.

The logic of capital inherently demands the instrumentalization of migrant workers, whose reproduction lay outside the capitalist sector, undertaken by the rural community and family in the non-capitalist countryside, so as to relieve capital of the cost of reproduction. However, “living labor” suggests something irreducible to mere instrument and which exceeds the control of capital. Laborer possesses his subjectivity, even though the capital tends to instrumentalize the labor. Hence, when the viewpoint is placed within the laboring subject, when literature speaks from the alienated body of the migrant laborer positioned and structured in the post-Fordist configuration of political economy, such literature ineluctably testifies to the process of a laboring body being destroyed. On one hand, it testifies to the cruelty of primitive accumulation, on the other hand, it witnesses the process of dying of the living body, and translates its anxiety, uneasiness, and irrationality aroused in such process. Because the living body of the subject cannot completely conform to the instrumental logic of global capitalism, it inevitably questions the post-Fordist configuration that fractures the living body. Once the living body, the bearer of labor power, acquires subjectivity and becomes conscious of its position in the urban-rural configuration, it will bring threat

to the entire system, manifesting itself in the ominous scenes of bloodshed, poison, breakdown, and violence of the living body. This is exactly what we can read from the “Underclass Literature.”

### ***Precarious Life and Crisis of Labor Power in “Underclass Literature”***

“Underclass Literature,” or, *diceng wenxue* (底层文学), became an outstanding phenomenon in 2004. Underclass literature features the downtrodden class at the bottom of Chinese society, or, to be more exact, the people who were formerly the masters of the socialist state but now are marginalized by China’s rapid economic development and its joining of the dominant order of global capital: peasants, laid-off workers during the privatization, migrant workers. Like Xueping Zhong points out, the significance of “diceng wenxue” lies in its documentation of the “subalternization” of the working class, that is, their pauperization and the loss of dignity,<sup>301</sup> which came along with the drastic social and economic transformation that took place in China after 1990s – privatization of state-owned enterprises and the resultant mass lay-offs of factory workers, marketization of public welfare system, the polarization of social classes, the enlarging income gap between rural and urban citizens, pauperization of peasants and workers, corruption. By the time of 2004, China had completed two major changes – it had completed the privatization of state-owned property through the “restructuring” of state-owned enterprises, and it had officially made entry to the order of global capitalism by joining the World Trade Organization. Underclass

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<sup>301</sup> Xueping Zhong, “*Internationale as Specter: Na’er, ‘Subaltern Literature,’ and Contemporary China’s ‘Left Bank,’*” in *China and New Left Visions: Political and Cultural Interventions*, ed. Ban Wang, Jie Lu (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012), 102.

literature, emerging under such circumstance, positions itself in a critical relationship to the unequal relations in social reality, and raise question the logic of capitalist modernization.

According to Chinese literary critic Li Yunlei, “underclass literature” draws its resources from the left-wing literary tradition established around May Fourth period, using realism as its primary method. It holds a critical and reflective attitude towards the socio-economic reality of the Chinese society, and has a strong concern and sympathetic attitude for the underprivileged class. It aims to speak for the underclass, and tell the untold stories of underclass, whose voices have been suppressed or overshadowed by the dominant discourse of modernization by elite intellectuals or upper class.<sup>302</sup>

An outstanding characteristic of “underclass literature” is its straightforward description of violence, death, and bloodshed. The two representative works that marked the phenomenal emergence of “underclass literature” in 2004 were Cao Zhenglu’s (曹征路) *There* (Na’er, 那儿), and Chen Yingsong’s (陈应松) *Bloodshed in Masiling Mountain* (Masiling xue’an, 马嘶岭血案), published in 2004. Cao’s fiction depicts how a labor union leader of a state-owned factory, after several failed attempts to stop the factory from being privatized and workers’ rights being sold, in desperation, committed suicide by placing himself under the hammering machine and letting himself be crushed. The story ends with a horrible scene: the leader’s headless body, the iron axes and grass hooks (symbols of the Communist Party) he made scattered

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<sup>302</sup> Li Yunlei, “Xinshiji wenxue zhong de diceng wenxue lungang,” 新世纪文学中的底层文学论纲 (Program on underclass literature in the new century), *Wenyi Zhengming* 文艺争鸣 (Debates in Literature and Arts), vol. 11 (2011): 25-26.

around on the ground, and empty wine bottles. The second fiction, *Bloodshed in Masiling Mountain*, tells the story about how two local villagers working as porters for a research team in deep mountains, due to a series of chafes and misunderstandings resulted from the drastic economic gap between the two parties (urban intellectuals and peasants), ended up killing the entire team. The ending scene of the story is an astonishing anesthetized rendering of the deaths at the crime scene: several corpses lying on the mountain like transparent rubies, glittering in the sunset.

The theme of “death” that frequently appears in “underclass literature” captures the condition of the living bodies of the downtrodden classes in the age of global capitalism. Especially, as we discussed above, when the rural migrants are treated by capital as “disposable” labor force that can be summoned and discharged by whimsical need of capital, the body of the laborer, as the bearer of labor power, inevitably perishes. The lack of care for the well being of peasants in the countryside due to poor infrastructures, the intense input of “unpaid labor” within the small peasant family, the overworking of the migrant’s body under poor working conditions, the exhausting travel back and forth between country and city, all cause damage to the laborer’s body, resulting in its premature death.

Below, I choose Fang Fang’s “Tu Ziqiang’s Personal Sorrow” (Tu Ziqiang de geren beishang, 涂自强的个人悲伤) (2013) and Chen Yingsong’s “Mother” (Muqin, 母亲) (2012) and “Wild Cat Lake” (Yemaohu, 野猫湖) (2012) as my subject of literary analyses. They have touched upon different situations of the families of migrating peasants and reveal the impossibility of family and the “death” that hovers above the vulnerable bodies of rural laborers like a shadow.

### (1) Fang Fang's "Tu Ziqiang's Personal Sorrow"

First, I would like to discuss Fang Fang's (方方) award-winning novella *Tu Ziqiang's Personal Sorrow* (Tu Ziqiang de geren beishang, 涂自强的个人悲伤) (2013).<sup>303</sup> It metaphorically illustrates the "impossibility" of family and the total destruction of the laborer's migrating body in the most thorough sense, revealing the "broken" and "fractured" nature of a migrant's body under the logic of post-Fordist capitalist China. Generating a sensation and heated discussion in 2013, this novella has been regarded the representative work of "underclass literature." Many critics and scholars have paid attention to Tu Ziqiang's vain "individual struggle" that tries to overcome the structured inequality of urban and rural sectors. The protagonist Tu Ziqiang becomes a "type" that typifies the failure of peasants' descendants to change their fate of being a migrant manual laborer through personal struggle, rendered impossible by the increasing gap between the city and the countryside. While back in the 1980s and early 1990s, getting a college degree and a descent job through one's intelligence and hard working was a reliable way of getting rid of the "peasant" identity and becoming an urban citizen,<sup>304</sup> nowadays, with the extremely uneven distribution of resources in the countryside and the city, it is no longer possible for a peasant's child to work their up the social ladder through individual struggle. Their

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<sup>303</sup> It won the award of "best novella of 2013" of *Chinese Writer* (中国作家) and "Fiction Academy of China" (中国小说学会).

<sup>304</sup> Such firm belief and strong confidence in peasant's being able to change his fate through personal struggle and excellency in education is typified in Lu Yao's famous works *Life* (Rensheng, 人生) (1982) and *Ordinary World* (Pingfan de shijie, 平凡的世界) (1986). These two works have served as the spiritual guide for people of rural background were the most popular works during 1980s and 1990s.



fate is structurally determined, hence the irony conveyed by the title “personal sorrow,” and by the protagonist’s name “Tu Ziqiang” (“涂自强” sounds like “徒自强”, which means “self-reliance in vain”). However, I want to focus on the aspect of the “impossibility” of family, and hence the impossibility for the reproduction of labor power in this novel. What makes this novel special is that Tu Ziqiang is not an ordinary rural migrant, but a college student, who, theoretically, is able to earn himself a decent living and can settle down in the city as an urban citizen. However, not only the extreme poverty of his family – a necessary effect of agriculture being the “non-capitalist” sector - precludes him from having equal chance in competing with others in job-seeking, but also his struggle to maintain the integrity of his family substantially weighs down his life.

Living in a small isolated village deep in the mountains, Tu’s family is a typical case of the structural “impossibility” of family rendered by the long-distance separation of the family and their children. At the beginning, the novel presents us a bleak picture of dwindling population of the Tu family, with three of their children dead or missing. Tu Ziqiang is the fourth child of his family. His elder sister went to the city at sixteen and lost contact ever since, even villagers who work in the city have no clue about where she had gone. Unable to afford the journey to the faraway city, Tu family gave up the hope of looking for her. One of Tu’s brothers was born with brain illness and died a premature death at age seven. Another brother of Tu left the village with other peasants to work as coal miners in the faraway province Shan Xi, and maintained intermittent contact with his family only through mails. In the first few years, he sent money to his family, and even sent a letter saying he has found himself a

wife; but later no message came from him any more, and words came out that he died under the mines, with no precise information about at which mine he was working, or where exactly he lives.

It is not surprising that “death” and “missing” often fall upon the population of rural migrants. Separated by the long distance between the workplace and the rural home, and unable to afford the expensive travel fares for the journey home, the migrant rarely reunites with his/her family, and only keep contact with the family through phone or letter. Deeply involved in the informal economy of post-Fordism, the migrants are in a highly unstable status of employment, frequently changing from jobs to jobs, and moving from one place to another place, and because they are not integrated into the urban social welfare system, it is hard for the government to trace and govern their residence. In other words, rural migrants constitute the huge population of flux and anonymous being.

The same situation happens to Tu Ziqiang, who goes to college in Wu Han City, which is far away from home. In order to go to Wu Han, the capital of Hubei Province, Tu Ziqiang needs first to walk over two mountains to get to the nearby town, and take a bus there to a small county called Xiang Fan, and take a bus to the capital Wu Han. Like his missing sister and brother, Tu finds it either difficult or extremely expensive to keep the integrity of the family over a long distance. At first, to save money, he chooses to stay in school for three years without ever paying a visit to his family, and only connects his family through phone. The long distance has kept him from knowing what is going on with his family; the first time he ever returns home since he enters college is when he hears the news of his father’s death due to the family’s fight over a

plot of land. Now that Tu's mother is left living alone in the village, Tu finds it impossible to properly take care of his mother over such a long distance. After an accident happened to his mother – she was buried under the collapsed roof caused by heavy snow (and the more fundamental reason for this accident was that there was no male laborer in the family to undertake the heavy manual labor of fixing the roof) and got her leg broken – Tu decides to get his mother to live with him in the city.

The act of making his mother live with him in the city instantly immediately disrupts the equilibrium of the “small holding family” analyzed above, whose economic stability is founded on the division of labor between agricultural work in the countryside and wage work in the city. While Tu's family could lead a relative “self-sufficient” life by feeding pigs and growing vegetables for their own consumption, after Tu's mother comes to live with him in the city, the cost of living instantly soars. His salary each month is only enough for the daily expenses of him and his mother. Renting the cheapest place in the city somewhat like slums or shanty town in the big city, he still tries to provide the comfortable living condition for his mother by renting a unit with independent kitchen and bath, and instead of sharing the apartment with other people, he pays for the entire unit, which takes up half of his monthly wages. Similar expenses are many. In order to cope with the coldness of the unheated apartment in the winter, he bought an electric heater for mother. He also rented internet service so that his mother can spend her idle time while he was working. As such, his salary is spent every month and couldn't put up any extra savings.

All of these stem from Tu's aspiration to provide “a normal life” for his mother in the city. “He is determined to settle down in the city. He is determined to let his

mother walk freely on street, like the aunts he often sees around the corner, carrying a basket and revealing satisfied smile on their faces.”<sup>305</sup> He dreams of the things that a “normal” persons should have: a descent job, a house, and a family; it never occurs to him what he sees as the “normal life” enjoyed by most “ordinary people” are only entitled to a limited group of “privileged” people, the Wu Han citizens, and never belongs to him. Even though Tu has a college degree, he cannot compete with graduates from famous universities. And for young people like Tu who have “no background, no good look, no good brand university and no competitive degree”, most jobs they can get are some informal jobs of some small companies, which give them meagre wages, provide no social insurance, and easily go broke. “Everyday, they run in and run out with a nervous look on their face. When this company shuts down, they shift to another company; when this boss is bad, they change to another boss; when this job has no prospect, they shift to another job.”<sup>306</sup> Tu shifts frequently between different “informal jobs” of telephone salesman, planner of ad company, salesman of insurance company, clerk of real estate company, delivery man for a computer store, and salesman of conditioner company.

The economic difficulty of Tu is exacerbated by the need to feed an extra mouth of his mother, who is incapable of working in the city. Coming from a remote village, Tu’s mother speaks a dialect which no Wu Han citizen could understand, likewise she cannot understand others. Lacking the ability to communicate with others, she cannot make of her way around the city on her own. Though she had tried working as

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<sup>305</sup> Fang Fang, “Tu Ziqiang de geren beishang,” 涂自强的个人悲伤 (Tu Ziqiang’s personal sorrow), in *Tu Ziqiang de Geren Beishang* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2014), 317.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 328.

waitress in the restaurant and as housemaid, her strong self-dignity (characteristic of independent small producers) is incompatible with the submissive attitude required of her by these jobs, hence she was often fired. Even the relative stable job of street cleaner which lasts for half a year is only a temporary contract-based job. Besides, she is often involved in accidents while Tu is at work, causing Tu to quit the job at hand to run back to check upon her. Once, while Tu was on a sales trip to another city, he received the word that she was missing; Tu had to terminate his visit in the mid way and runs back to find her. It turns out she was cheated by some swindlers and lost her way while chasing them; unable to communicate with the people, she cannot find the way home. Tu's frequent absence and distraction from work infuriates his boss, who threatens to fire him. When Tu pleads for his forgiveness and asks him to sympathize his situation of having an aged dependent, his boss replies: "Such things would never happen to my mother." This is not only because the manager's mother and Tu's mother have different social statuses, but also because Tu is now living in an age which makes family impossible. Unlike the welfare state which take care of the worker's family and provide subsidies for the worker's dependents, the post-Fordist age requires "disposable workers" and "migrants," who are expected not to be burdened with family and are responsible only for themselves. Hence, facing the gap between urban citizens and rural migrants, between the stable and fully integrated local citizens and instable and precarious migrant outsiders, Tu not only stands "on uneven ground" with others, but the drastic height can even be described as "steep cliff."

Aware of the “steep” gap between him and others, Tu Ziqiang nevertheless thinks he can overcome these difficulties through his “individual struggle.” “My predetermined condition is already inferior compared to others. I can do nothing else to make up for this but by working hard, making more effort, and struggling with my life. This is my life. If I cannot expect to compete with others, I can at least compete with myself.”<sup>307</sup> Interestingly, Tu’s unwavering faith in “self-reliance” and “personal struggle” comes from his small peasant family, which leads an independent and an almost self-sufficient life. Being a small name that has no power in the village, “We have nothing but self-reliance” has become a motto of the Tu Family. Just like Kautsky remarks, small farmers tend to overwork themselves to the point of self-exploitation in their competition with the large capitalist farms, we also see Tu tries to overwork himself, by exhausting his biggest asset, labor power. Therefore, he liberally expends his “labor,” which is “free” and does not “cost” him anything. In the same way that small farmers exclude the labor cost from the calculation of “wage,” Tu exerts the physical capacity of his body in such a way as if it were “free of cost” and can be expended at will. He barely rests on holidays or weekends; to save money, he runs from place to place on foot instead of taking bus; he cuts the expense on food to the minimum extent; and he did not buy any health insurance. When he catches cold and coughs, he refuses to go to hospital but drinks a lot of water instead, for he cannot afford the extra expenses on medicine. Even when he coughs blood, he hangs on with his will power. He tried so hard to “internalize” all the obstacles and external difficulties into his “personal struggle” by over-expending his “labor power” that his

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 335.

body couldn't bear the high intensity and often "felt tired." Finally, it collapses: he was diagnosed with late-stage lung cancer. He couldn't afford the expensive medical treatment, for he was not integrated into the social welfare system and did not buy commercial health insurance, and he ended up dying. As a matter of fact, Tu Ziqiang falls into the situation which Marx describes for proletariat: he has nothing to sell but his labor power. Tu's tragic fate of exchanging his labor for cash, over-expending his physical capacity to make up for his extreme shortage of cash, spells the common fate of all migrant workers venturing into the city in the hope of "earning money." Not integrated into the city's welfare system to properly take care of their life, earning little money that is barely enough to build a home in the city, and having no family around to take care of them, their labor power quickly diminishes and dies out.

He had pictured himself wearing a suit, driving a car, living on a high-rise and looking down upon the street, strolling in the park with his wife and holding his child in his arms. He had also pictured himself sitting in a spacious office with a large desk, signing his name on a document, having his photograph taken and his interview published on newspaper. He had even pictured himself attending a conference in the Great Hall of the People and shaking hands with state leaders. He had thought a lot about his life and he has been struggling for this perfect life he pictured. It never occurred to him that he has no life at all. The diagnosis of the doctor deleted his life from this beautiful world, to which he would no longer have any relevance.<sup>308</sup>

Having no relevance to the world is not only a metaphor for his departing from this world, but profoundly reveals the positions for all rural migrants: anonymous beings that cannot be recognized by the order. Keeping the news of his imminent death from mother, Tu tries to find a way for his mother to settle in the city. However,

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 338.

for a lonely old rural woman who has no husband or son, and has neither income nor capability to work, there is no way for her to live in the city, as no institution would accommodate her. Tu's money could barely afford her stay in the rest home through three months, and the city's bureau of civil affairs wouldn't take responsibility for her since she is not an urban citizen. Women's Federation and welfare house wouldn't take her in either, since she is neither disabled nor ill; and as she is not too old, she is expected to support herself through her own labor. Finally, a temple kindly took her in.

In the end, Tu's disappearance from the world is also anonymous: he walks into the mountains from which he came out: "This man, this man called Tu Ziqiang, walks out of the sight of the world step by step. From then on, no one ever sees Tu Ziqiang. His disappearance does not even get noticed. How lonely is this man! The world in which he lives doesn't even know if he exists or not. Or, he is too small to be remembered."<sup>309</sup>

Tu's individual demise is the tragic termination of the whole Tu Family, because he does not have any descendants; and the reason he remains unmarried is that no girl in the city wants to date an economically unstable migrant living with a dependent in a rented place. As is well known, it is impossible for rural migrants to establish a family in the city. The neoliberal economy requires that migrants are single and only responsible for themselves. They can, at best, maintain a "divided family between urban and rural sector", having the parents or wife live in the countryside and take care of his offspring. The doom of Tu Ziqiang - his exhaustion of his laboring body through overwork - stems from none other than his attempt to fulfill the impossible

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 345.



desire of letting his family “settle down in the city” like “normal people.” Tu’s failure to break this pattern of “divided family” to keep his family in the city in essence illustrates the impossibility for migrant’s reproduction of labor power in the city.

## (2) Logic of Love: Chen Yingsong’s “Mother” and “Wild Cat Lake”

If Fang Fang’s novella illustrates the exhaustion of migrant labor in the city, then Chen Yingsong’s (陈应松) novella *Mother* (Muqin, 母亲) (2012) illustrates the exhaustion of old people’s labor power in the countryside, which, as analyzed above, is indispensable for the reproduction of small holder family. It offers a glimpse into how a small holder’s family in the countryside collapses when they lose the most precious “auxiliary labor” of old people. In the story, the independent and capable mother, who had raised up her four kids on her own, suddenly had a cerebral thrombosis at the age of 76 and paralyzed ever since, which completely disrupted everybody’s life in the family.

The story shows us how the precarious “balance” and “self-sufficient” state of small holder family is built on the consistent input of old people’s auxiliary and unwaged labor. Living in her elder son’s house, Mother not only takes good care of herself, but feeds two pigs for the consumption of the whole family, washes clothes and cooks for the family, takes care of her grandchildren, and often walks over mountains to bring lunch to her daughter working as teacher in the primary school in another village. Her “auxiliary labor” is so indispensable for the whole family that when she fell ill, the family instantly shows signs of decay. “There are no more grains

in the pot, no more vegetables in the yard,” and “without her collecting grass to feed the pigs, the pigs now starve to bones.”<sup>310</sup>

The first problem for the family is the expensive cost for medical treatment. A mere few days in hospital has cost them 1000 yuan, which was a bit amount for a small peasant's family. Since the family cannot afford the expensive CT (Computerized Tomography) scan, which costs 250 yuan per scan, the hospital can neither locate the exact spot of the illness nor diagnose the cause of the pain; having no idea where the pain comes from, the doctor can at best prescribe some medicines for her stomachaches or give her pain-reliever injection. Besides, as they are not within the urban medical welfare system, even the most ordinary procedure of temperature measuring and blood pressure measuring, means substantial cost to the family. “Each time the nurse walked in with a plate in her hand, their sweated and their heartbeat hastened, as if they saw robbers come in, as if they saw their money being thrown into the river.”<sup>311</sup> As the medical treatment soon exhausted their savings, they had to take Mother out of the hospital and sustained her life by using the cheap and native methods.

The second problem is the extra labor they have to put into taking care of the paralyzed mother - washing her body, changing her bed, feeding her, massaging her body, helping her with the toilet, while enduring her upsetting moaning and howling caused by the constant pain. Taking care of the mother disrupts their life and discontinues even the simplest reproduction of daily life. The family, full of the weak

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<sup>310</sup> Chen Yingsong, “Muqin” 母亲 (Mother), in *Yemaohu* 野猫湖 (*Wild Cat Lake*) (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2012), 197.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

and the old, now reveals its truly broken and fragile nature. The eldest son's family, suffering the high blood pressure, anemia, and hereditary heart disease, simply lack the capability to take care of the paralyzed mother. The second son, who lives in another village and runs back and forth to look after mother, suffers the economic loss as his sheep go missing or die of plague due to the lack of attention. The youngest son, suffering from minor brain damage, is a temporary worker who could barely feed himself and does not even own his place. The eldest daughter, being a grandmother herself, has to contribute her own auxiliary labor to her own household, looking after three grandchildren. The youngest daughter, occupied by her full-time job as a primary school teacher, almost gets fired for the accidents caused during her leave from the school to look after mother. The demand of continual input of labor into looking after the patient has fundamentally disrupted the equilibrium of their life and production, that even the simple reproduction and daily life cannot continue. Finally, the sons and daughters decided, "If she doesn't die, then we will all have to die."<sup>312</sup> They chose to poison the mother, who, for the sake of her sons and daughters, willingly drank up the poison.

What we see here is how the logic of love is exploited by capital to the extreme. Love does not ask for price, and hence constitutes a "free gift" out of which capital ceaselessly draws its profits of labor power. The "love" and the "unremunerated labor" relieves capital or the state of its responsibility to take care of the laborer in old age. Hence, in the story, the 76-year-old mother willingly devoted all of her labor into the big family without asking for return, and continued to work for the family until her

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 210-211.

body collapses. However, her love for the children falls victim of the logic of capitalism. When she has lost her capacity to work and needs children's love and care in return, what dominates her children's thoughts is the pure economic calculation – the limited resources should be devoted to the younger generation who have a future ahead, instead of wasting on the “useless” old people who are about to die.

In Hubei Province, the hometown of Cheng Yingsong, sociologist He Xuefeng find a cruel fact that the suicide rate of the old people in Jingshan County is exceedingly high. The old people are expected to work as long as they can still move, and once they are too weak or too old to be useful to children, they tend to commit suicide, quietly and secretly, in order not to cause any more trouble to their children.<sup>313</sup> In other words, once the “labor value” of the aged parent is exploited to the very last bit, the parent can be disposed of. Inherent in such utilitarian calculation of the elderly's “use value” is exactly the logic of “disposable worker” under neo-liberalism, which absolves the state and capitalist of the obligation of taking care of laborers' bodies. Finally, we witness in the mother the similar destination of Tu Ziqiang: the ultimate exhaustion of labor power, or, to be more accurate, the termination of labor force itself, death.

Precisely because “love” is the key to sustaining the integrity of peasant family, in recent years, many scholars and policy-makers have emphasized the importance of upholding the values of family in the countryside.<sup>314</sup> However, can we take “love” for granted? We may ask, what if “love” is missing? Chen Yingsong's fiction “Wild Cat

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<sup>313</sup> He, *Xiangcun Shehui Guanjianci*, 138.

<sup>314</sup> For example, He Xuefeng proposes that it is necessary to uphold peasant's family values, which has no less important value than religious faith. See He, *Xiangcun Shehui Guanjianci*, 114.

Lake” shows, when the non-capitalist sphere of “love” is exploited by the logic of capital to the very last bit, it causes the disintegration of family and even the total collapse of social order in the countryside.

The beginning of novella shows a dreary picture of a village where most of the men have gone to the city to earn money, leaving only women and the elderly behind. With nearly all the men gone, women who live alone in the village are exposed to the frequent assaults by thieves and robbers, as well as thefts and robbery targeting their property. With her husband working the city, Xiang'er, the most beautiful woman in the village, finds herself in a position that is physically defenseless and economically vulnerable. On one hand, she definitely needs man's help in money as well as in labor, when her field is drowned by a rainstorm, when she needs extra hands to help her harvest the rapeseeds from the field during busy season, when the field is infested with pests, or when the cattle gets sick. On the other hand, she has to shun away from the “help” of the village head, who covets her beauty and often “helps” women in exchange for their bodies. She also finds herself physically incapable of defending herself or her property. Working alone in the field constantly exposes her to the danger of being raped by rogues wandering in the fields, and living alone in the house invites the thieves who once stole away the cow and knocked her out when she was trying to chase them.

It is at this time that the middle-aged widow, Sister Zhuang, stepped into her life and replaced the role of her husband. Losing her husband three years ago and living alone with her son, Sister Zhuang has turned into a spiritually and physically strong person; even her physicality has picked up some characteristics of man: her voice is

coarse, and her fat body is full of strength. Missing sexual life for many years, she even teases that she has “turned into a man.” She helped Xiang’er with work in the field, checked upon her safety regularly, looked after her house while she was away, and accompanied her through the horrifying nights, and even rescued Xiang’er from being raped by the rogues.

Receiving her care, protection, and love, Xiang’er not only became emotionally attached to her, but also grew physically intimate with her. She thinks, “Who ever cares for me like this?” After all, “Sister Zhuang is the one who tucks the quilt for her. Her hand feels like a mother and a father. Her eyes are kind and full of love.”<sup>315</sup> Meanwhile, “there is no news from San You, her husband. The other end of phone is always a female voice saying the number is out of service. And she never receives a phone call from him.”<sup>316</sup> When they sleep together and Zhuang’s hand tenderly caresses over her body, Xiang’er suddenly realizes that “San You doesn’t love me anymore; without the participation of the hand there is no love.”<sup>317</sup>

Eventually, “she forgets there is still a San You”, until “at a dusty dusk, a man showed up in front of her, his head and face covered in dust.” “San You walked in the house like a stranger and a beggar, which astonished her.”<sup>318</sup> While San You chatted with her like he had never left, Xiang’er tried in vain to update him with all the things happened while he was away, that sister-in-law died, that cattle was once stolen and then retrieved. She was surprised by his ignorance of the change in this house - the new rice she grew with Zhuang: “Why does he not ask about the fresh rice? Why does

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<sup>315</sup> Chen Yingsong, “Yemaohu” 野猫湖 (“Wild Cat Lake”), in *Yemaohu* (Wild Cat Lake), 138.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 144.

he not ask where the rice came from?” “After all this chatting, he still did not ask where the rice came from, who planted it, who harvested it. The rice smelling so nice is definitely not old rice. Does he no longer care?” Obviously, San You took her life in the countryside for granted, assuming she had always maintained this peaceful and affluent life without him. Hence, she reached the conclusion, “he doesn’t care us at all.”<sup>319</sup> Unwilling to have her current peaceful life with Sister Zhuang disturbed by San You’s return, she withheld from telling him that the dog meat he bought from the bazaar was poisoned, and did not stop him from eating the poisonous meat. Finally, when San You died, that Xiang’er finally called Zhuang by the name that Zhuang had always wanted her to call, “husband.”

While love is supposed to sustain the integrity of family, in the form of self-sacrifice – the wife Xiang’er is supposed to endure all the harsh difficulties and cares for the family while waiting for her husband to return, however, in the story, “love” itself is problematized. Without the medium of care, protection, and intimacy offered by the corporeal body, “love” easily falls apart - “without the participation of hand, there is no love.” It reveals the inner paradox and the unsustainability of the “divided family” between the city and the countryside.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I conceptualize how, the small peasant family, grounded in the “household contract responsibility system” after the dissolution of the cooperative, emerged as a peculiar mechanism in post-Fordist age to create a huge reservoir of

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 146.

rural migrant workers that suited the need of neoliberal capitalism for cheap, flexible, and disposable labor force. On one hand, the peasant family must remain intact as an economic unit in order to reproduce itself, combining together wage from the migrant member in the city and agricultural income from the countryside. On the other hand, such family is inherently and structurally fractured and split between country and the city. Such precarious and unstable family is sustained by the logic of “love,” which generates unremunerated labor input without asking for price. Such instrumental use of labor finally results in the total erasure of the body of laborer, the termination of labor power itself. The traces of the dying process of the laborer’s bodies have been recorded in the underclass literature. Fang Fang’s “Tu Ziqiang’s Personal Sorrow” presents us a process of how the body of a migrating young man is exhausted to death while trying to have his family settle in the city, Chen Yingsong’s novella “Mother” and “Wild Cat Lake,” on the other hand, shows how “love” within the family is exploited by capital to such extent that love itself gets questioned and loses its ground. As a result, family, as an institution that carries out labor reproduction for capitalism, is now facing the crisis of disintegration to the point that family may lose its designated function of reproducing labor.



### CHAPTER 3

#### “EXODUS” OF LABOR AND “NEW COMMON” TOWARD THE FUTURE

Last chapter, I have shown how the dissolution of the commune and the individualized production under the “household contract responsibility system” created an “outside,” a non-capitalist sector of small holdership, onto which capital “externalizes” the cost of reproduction of labor, and which generates a huge army of cheap migrant labor force that suits the needs of the flexible economy of post-Fordist China. However, like any “outside” that capital tries to incorporate into its metabolic cycle for the purpose of extracting surplus value and tries every means to tame its heterogeneity, such agricultural “outside” also poses threat to capital by introducing radical “otherness” into capital and subverts its logic. Harry Harootunian points out in his analysis of “formal subsumption,” while the structure of contemporaneous configuration of different temporalities is essential for capital’s self-reproduction, it at the same time generates within itself “the force of temporal interruption, unevenness, fracturing, and heterogeneity.”<sup>320</sup> In reproducing the old elements for the purpose of creating surplus value, it also brings in the radical otherness (or historicity) of a different temporality of pre-capitalist society, which capitalism tries every means to bury or “naturalize.” Once the suppressed historicity and heterogeneous elements have been discovered, excavated, and activated, the possibilities for an alternative future could be opened.

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<sup>320</sup> Harry Harootunian, *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 64.

In this sense, the role of “outside” of the countryside for China’s capitalism would not just mean the source for raw material and cheap labor like the “colony,” or as a dumping ground to which global capital “externalizes” its costs and emits its waste (both “material wastes” and the “human waste” such as the weak, the aged, the disabled that have been exploited and disposed by the city). Because the countryside undertakes the job of producing labor force for the capitalist economy in the city, and because labor power is the most important factor that sustains the production circuit of capital, countryside may end up a source of instability for the capitalist system, as it always contains the possibility of terminating the supply of labor power.

According to Gavin Walker, even within capitalist system, labor power commodity itself constitutes the “outside” of the capitalist mode of production. His study of Japanese Marxist Uno Kozo shows that, labor power, as the source and origin of surplus value, creates an opening that disrupts the smooth operation of capitalism, a “threshold” or “limit” of capital which capitalism itself cannot overcome. “Labor power haunts the circuit M-C-M, incapable of serving as a stable element.”<sup>321</sup> On one hand, “Capitalism, in essence, is a systemic and total force, a closed cycle without limits, but this cycle’s very existence and operation are enabled only by a fundamental outside, that is, the existence of sufficient inputs of labor power as well as the existence of excess labor power that can be employed in future rising levels of production.”<sup>322</sup> The continuing cycle of capitalist (re)production is predicated upon the ceaseless input of labor power into the production process. Thus, the continuation of

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<sup>321</sup> Gavin Walker, *The Sublime Perversion of Capital: Marxist Theory and the Politics of History in Modern Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 120

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 128.

capital must always presume that labor power is given and available at hand. On the other hand, “labor power is something that cannot be produced in the production process as a commodity,”<sup>323</sup> but “must always-already be intersected by another surface or entire phase of capital’s circuit, the consumption process.”<sup>324</sup> That is, the process in which the laborer consumes food and clothing to replenish his physical power and reproduces himself lies “outside” the capitalist production process and “can never be strictly presupposed in capital’s interior.”<sup>325</sup>

Therefore, capital delegates its most important task, the reproduction of labor power, to the state, which undertakes the responsibility to “care for and shelter life in order to ensure the consistent and constant supply of labor power that can be commodified.”<sup>326</sup> “Without the nation, the malleable elements of labor power cannot be recirculated as if they were directly graspable, by means of the reproduction of the worker’s body on the outside.”<sup>327</sup> Through instituting laws to protect property (capital), enforcing borders to govern the migration of population, and setting up welfare system to take care of people’s lives, the state provides for capital the stable supply of labor power. However, Walker points out, there is always a “torsion” or “rupture” in the production of labor power that cannot be mended, because labor power can only be “substantialized” and “actualized” during the production process. Since the laborer is deprived of the means of production, only in factory can his labor power be “actualized” and combine with the means of production to create use value. When the

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 103.

capitalist spends the money to purchase labor power as commodity, what he purchases is only the appearance of commodity. “Labor power comes to exist or is called into life only when it is utilized in the process of production. Prior to its use it is nothing more than a potentiality that is materially absent.” Hence, labor power “does not exist as something substantial”; “rather, it is retrospectively made to have existed only during the process of production itself.”<sup>328</sup> Therefore, labor power “lacks a stable presence, a ‘commodity body.’”<sup>329</sup> The impossibility of “commodification” of labor power constitutes an inherent and structural defect of capitalism. Because labor power is never a stable element, the circuit of capital hence remains forever a “defective circle,” “a circuit process that never quite reaches its cyclical starting point.”<sup>330</sup>

If, as Walker shows, the separation of (re)production of labor power (in the realm of life) from usage of labor power (within the factory) generates an inherent “fracture” or “split” in the labor commodity (and hence the opening within capitalism), then, in China, the gap between (re)production of labor power and usage of labor power is enlarged to an even greater extent, to the gap between the countryside and the city. In China, laborer is produced in the countryside, but has to travel a long distance from the inland agricultural provinces to the coastal cities to actualize his labor power; this implies that the supply of labor power is even more unstable and more out of control by capital. Such instability is further reinforced by the still valid “collective land ownership,” which suggests there exists the possibility of reactivating a kind of collective economy capable of producing enough surplus value to keep the peasants on

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 25

the land instead of let them flow into the city for employment. As such, it may indicate an alternative mode of life, a common life.

### ***Seeking the “Common” from within Capitalism***

In the West, there have been various efforts to re-conceptualize the “common” and reverse the “primitive accumulation.” One potential way of re-building the “common” is the biopolitical production of alternative subjectivity proposed by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt.

Hardt and Negri seek for resistance from within modernity itself. According to them, while labor power derives from life, life always exceeds the control of capital. Though there is “power over life” exerted by disciplinary regimes of capitalism and state that try to produce subjects and provide labor power for capital, there is always “the power of life to resist and determine an alternative production of subjectivity.”<sup>331</sup> Such “power of life,” immanent to the living body itself, comes with and even before the imposition of the modern regime, and constitutes the necessary condition for the exercise of power. “At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom.”<sup>332</sup> Therefore, anti-modernity co-exist with modernity: “Antimodernity is prior in the sense that the power relation of modernity can be exercised only over free subjects who express that freedom through resistance to hierarchy and domination. Modernity has to react to contain those forces of liberation.”<sup>333</sup> For this reason, the way to resist

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<sup>331</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 57.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 101.

capitalism is to stay right inside capitalism; and the way to reconstruct a new common come from the “common” conditions prepared by contemporary capitalism. For them, today’s capitalism has erased “the differences of kind that used to divide labor” and has created “the condition for various types of labor to communicate, collaborate, and become common.”<sup>334</sup>

Assuming that all material means of production have already been “enclosed” and “expropriated” by capital, Hardt and Negri look to the “immaterial” means of production which is yet to be privatized by capital, such as “information flows, communication networks, social codes, linguistic innovations, and practices of affects and passions.”<sup>335</sup> Accordingly, they propose, the way to rebuild the new “common” is through organizing and engaging the different singular subjects in the cooperative production of immaterial knowledge, such as values, codes, images, languages, music, which they hope would escape the capturing of capital and transcend the boundaries posed by the regime of “private property.”

Hardt and Negri’s theory of “common” is based on two important concepts of Baruch Spinoza, “singular” and “multitude.” The subject of production of commons, the “multitude,” historically refers to the victims who have been deprived of their means of production by the enclosure and excluded from the political body in 17<sup>th</sup> England. They were “the remainder left by the violent appropriation conducted by nascent powers of capital” and “prisoners of the new conditions of the production and reproduction.”<sup>336</sup> According to Hardt and Negri, in 17<sup>th</sup> century England “comes to

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<sup>334</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 107.

<sup>335</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 140.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

connote the lowest rank of society and the propertyless, since they are the most visibly excluded from the dominant political bodies,” which consisted of “shoemaker, Farrier, Weaver, Tanner, Mercer, Brewer, Butcher, Barber,”<sup>337</sup> and even vagrants and beggars. In a word, they are the plurality of proletarians. Hence, “multitude” is “the name of the poor” which stands opposite to the political identity based on property. It stands for “a political body without distinction of property, a mixed body that is unbounded.”<sup>338</sup>

It must be noted that “multitude” denotes a kind of existence prior to the emergence of modern “proletariat.” Hardt and Negri choose to re-activate the word “multitude” in order to avoid the “homogenization” involved in the organized form of “proletariat,” and to stress that “singularity” is the basis of “multitude.” These singularities are free and autonomous subjects who have their own determinates. Based on Spinoza’s philosophy, Hardt and Negri redefine multitude as “an open and inclusive political body,”<sup>339</sup> “an inclusive body in the sense that it is open to encounters with all other bodies, and its political life depends on the qualities of these encounters.”<sup>340</sup> It consists of the multiplicity of social singularities “whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness.”<sup>341</sup> Acting as free and autonomous subjects, they freely associate with each in struggle and “seek to coordinate their common actions and maintain their equality in horizontal organizational structures.”<sup>342</sup> Their organizational structure is “horizontal,” characterized by equality and openness to otherness, rather than “vertical,” characterized by subordination, hierarchy, and

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>341</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 99.

<sup>342</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 110.

exclusiveness. And the space for such “common,” they propose, is the “metropolis,” which provides conditions for “the unpredictable encounters among singularities, with not only those you do not know but also those who come from elsewhere, with different cultures, languages, knowledges, mentalities.”<sup>343</sup> “The metropolis is to the multitude what the factory was to the industrial working class”,<sup>344</sup> it is “a site not only of encounters but also of organization and politics.”<sup>345</sup> We can see that the political theory of Negri and Hardt is especially suited to the conditions of post-Fordist conditions of capitalism in which the highly fluid, highly fragmented, heterogeneous population (especially the multi-ethnic migrants) continually crisscross and destabilize predetermined borders of various kinds, rendering the old forms of organization (labor union, nation-state) ineffective, hence their proposed organizing principles, such as “openness,” “autonomy,” and “freedom” of subjects, resist any predetermined form of union or unity, such as the state, the labor unions, etc.

It is worth noting that Hardt and Negri focus primarily on the politico-cultural reinvention of the social relations without, however, challenging the the economic base of the means of production. In other words, it is “subjectivity” or “values” that they concern, rather than the actual distribution of wealth. For example, the term “multitude” does not carry any class connotation; it does not designate a specific social standing or economic status, but rather points to a kind of subjectivity “regardless of social order or property.”<sup>346</sup> Although “multitude” is “the name of the poor” and “is characterized by poverty,” however, “the poverty of the multitude ...

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 40.



does not refer to its misery or deprivation or even its lack, but instead names a production of social subjectivity that results in a radically plural and open body politic, opposed to both the individualism and the exclusive, unified social body of property. The poor ... refers not to those who have nothing but to the wide multiplicity of all those who are inserted in the mechanisms of social production regardless of social order or property.”<sup>347</sup> Hence, people of any class can be part of this multitude so long as they promote the right subjectivity.

Accordingly, the “exodus” they propose, the “process of subtraction from the relationship with capital” by “actualizing the potential autonomy of labor-power,”<sup>348</sup> does not mean to sever the relation with capital, or to stop providing their labor to capital and disrupt the production process like class struggles in the past, but means “staying right here” (right within the capitalist system), and “transforming the relations of production and mode of social organization under which we live.”<sup>349</sup> In other words, they do not seek to change the conditions of production, the ownership of means of production, but to utilize the given/assigned material conditions of the capitalist mode of production to forge new social relations. Their rebellion is “within and against” the capitalism,<sup>350</sup> which means the reproduction of capital may continue to carry on without disruption. In this light, to what extent is such “exodus” from capital effective remains a question. Besides, the “immaterial labor” which they count on as a new form of “common” may very well depend on capital itself. What they presume, as the premise of their theory, is a “finished” state of capitalism, which had

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 70.

already completed primitive accumulation, established capitalist mode of production, and had enclosed every “outside” into its omnipotent rule.

Hardt and Negri’s conceptualization of “the common” is inspiring for us in understanding the post-Fordist capitalism, however, it does not suit to the conditions of “common” and “commune” as we have seen in China’s history and literature. In fact, Hardt and Negri have been criticized for their Western-centrism. Massimo De Angelis criticizes Hardt and Negri for focusing only on “the world of ‘immaterial labor’ and ‘post-Fordism,’ of high-tech and instant communication” while neglecting areas outside the advanced capitalist countries, where many “non-capitalist” elements are still retained. For example, he points out, “the post-Fordist flexibilization of production was accompanied by a dramatic increase in production in sweatshops and factories around the world, many of which retain typical Fordist features.”<sup>351</sup> And in the global loops of capitalism, “modern slavery ... trickles up in the global production chain by allowing cheaper food and cheaper general conditions of reproduction, thus lowering the value of labor power ... for skilled Indian programmers connected by instant communications to their American clients.”<sup>352</sup> Hence, De Angelis suggests, instead of looking to “the ‘creative’, ‘immaterial’ workers ... as the ‘vanguard’ of the revolution” for the frontline of resistance of capital, we should look to “the Central American indigenous ... struggling against the enclosure of their lands through Plan Puebla-Panama,”<sup>353</sup> “the Zapatistas and other similar commoners, especially the indigenous, the peasants, the just-in-time factory workers in the ‘free trade zones’ of

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<sup>351</sup> Massimo De Angelis, *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 103.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 32

the third world, the peasant mothers, the slum communities struggling in a variety of contexts for livelihoods and dignity.”<sup>354</sup> In his view, alterity should be sought in the ongoing struggles against capital in the areas “outside” the advanced capitalist states.

Hence, different from Hardt and Negri’s notion of “common” that is based on the shared network of information and knowledge, the “common” for De Angelis refers to the linkage and integration of different communities around the world in their common struggle against the global loops of capitalist production. Because “capital has always been global,”<sup>355</sup> it is in essence a “global articulation of different conditions and activities of production and reproduction, different socio-economic compositions of labour, different class compositions, different cultural languages of struggles, different subjectivities,”<sup>356</sup> hence, communities across the globe suffer from the common fate of enclosure, the forceful separation from non-market conditions for reproducing their livelihoods:

At the peak of the slave trade, coinciding with the English industrial revolution, the men, women and children entering Manchester’s sweatshops and working daily for 14 or 16 hours in exchange for a pittance were the result of the proletarianization of the preceding three centuries of enclosure of lands, state repression of the struggles for commons and criminalization of ‘indigence’ and ‘vagrancy,’ all means that increased dependency on the market (this time the ‘labour market’) as a means for the reproduction of livelihood. Also the mines, plantations and other ‘business operations’ in the ‘new world’ were put in place on lands and along rivers expropriated from the local populations, while the slave-bodies shipped to work in them were themselves ‘enclosed’, forcefully separated from their communities.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 49

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 49

Because capital always works through “global articulation of a multitude of techniques and strategies, from slavery to wage labour, from unwaged work of reproduction to post-Fordist temporary work, from unwaged third world petty commodity producers on the breadline to the highly skilled ‘systems analysts’ of high-tech capitalism, from Fordist sweatshops to cognitive precarious labour,”<sup>358</sup> hence, accordingly, the “exodus” from capital would be the common struggle of the planetary social body to dissociate from capital, the “overcoming of this articulation dividing the global social body and pitting co-producing communities against each other.”<sup>359</sup>

Compared to Hardt and Negri, De Angelis has paid more attention to the rebelling power of the “outside” which is articulated in the uneven structure of global capitalism. Nevertheless, De Angelis agrees with Hardt and Negri that resistance can be found within the social body of a capitalist society, which is “the spheres of relations, value practices, affects as well as forms of power relations, conflict and mutual aid that we constitute beyond capitalist relations of production.”<sup>360</sup> For De Angelis, the “value practice” that operates on a different logic than the market, money, and accumulation is the fundamental way of labor’s “exodus” from capital, because capital, as “a social force,” always tries to interlace and articulate “the practices of a multiplicity of social subjects,” to make sure that “the mental and manual activities of these singularities, their *doing*, constituted in a web of social relations, *are coupled* to these value practices so as to reproduce capital itself in its endless drive for self-

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 50

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 50

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 34-35

expansion.”<sup>361</sup> Hence, the way of “exodus” from capital lies in the breaking away from such articulation, the “de-coupling” from the value practices of capital by creating alternative value practices.

Besides seeking “the common” from inside capitalism, there are also attempts in historical studies that try to recuperate the historically lost “common” occurred at the historical moment of 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the multiethnic and interracial “multitude” tried to “de-link” from the domination of capital by taking possession of the means of production from capitalist through cooperative labor. In Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker’s study of the transatlantic economy of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, the “multitudes” refer specifically to the multi-ethnic lower-class who were involved in the trans-atlantic trade as sailors. Many crew members of these transatlantic vessels during the first half of the seventeenth century were “dispossessed commoners, transported felons, indentured servants, religious radicals, pirates, urban laborers, soldiers, sailors, and African slaves.”<sup>362</sup> Among them were former little proprietors and tenants who used to maintain themselves and families on the commonland before the Enclosure drove them out, hence they retained a living memory of open-field agriculture and communing in England and Ireland, and sought to restore the common way of life whenever there was a chance.<sup>363</sup> It was in this context that a historical moment of rebuilding “the common” by the motley crew emerged in the transatlantic trade.

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 38

<sup>362</sup> Peter Linebaugh, Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 23.

Linebaugh and Rediker show, when the transatlantic vessel of Virginia Company, *Sea-Venture*, wrecked on Bermuda, sailors on the vessel decided to settle in Bermuda Island and refused to go to Virginia. The “motley crew” on vessel consisted of “sailors, laborers, craftsmen, and commoners of several sorts, including two Native Americans, Namuntack and Matchumps.”<sup>364</sup> Knowing that “the ease, pleasure, and freedom of the commons” is better than “the wretchedness, labor, and slavery awaiting them in Virginia,”<sup>365</sup> these former commoners conspired and rebelled against the Virginia Company officials, hoping to stay on the Bermuda island to start a egalitarian common life through cooperative labor. Their cooperative labor existed not only on the ship when they “steered the vessel, struck sails, cleared the decks, and pumped out the water that was seeping into the hull,” but also extended to the shore, when they were “building huts out of palmetto fronds for shelter and communing of subsistence – hunting and gathering, fishing and scavenging.”<sup>366</sup> Taking “the classless, stateless, egalitarian societies of America” as their model,<sup>367</sup> they decided to “retire to the woods and live like savages,”<sup>368</sup> hoping to build “a world without work, private property, law, felony, treason, or magistrate.”<sup>369</sup>

Such multiethnic struggles, Linebaugh and Rediker point out, existed everywhere during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, because the “expropriation occurred not only in England but also in Ireland, Africa, the Caribbean, and North America.”<sup>370</sup> In Virginia, “colonists refused to work, mutinied, and often deserted to the Powhatan Indians,” and

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 27-28

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 21

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 28.

“soldiers, sailors, and Indians conspired to smuggle guns and tools from the Virginia Company’s stores and held ‘night marts’ to sell the appropriated goods.”<sup>371</sup> In Ireland, “English soldiers and settlers ... deserted the plantations to join the Irish,” hoping “to live idle among the savages.”<sup>372</sup> With the rise of the transatlantic trade, there emerged around the globe an “amorphous laboring class,”<sup>373</sup> like “a many-headed hydra.” To quote Linebaugh and Rediker’s description of this class:

This class was *anonymous, nameless*. ... It was *landless, expropriated*. It lost the integument of the commons to cover and protect its needs. It was poor, lacking property, money, or material riches of any kind. ... Its origins were often traumatic: enclosure, capture, and imprisonment left lasting marks. It was *female and male, of all ages*. ... It included everyone from youth to old folks, from ship’s boys to old salts, from apprentices to savvy old masters, from young prostitutes to old ‘witches.’ It was *multitudinous, numerous, and growing*. ... It was *cooperative and laboring*. The collective power of the many rather than the skilled labor of the one produced its most forceful energy. ... It was *motley*, both dressed in rags and multiethnic in appearance. Like Caliban, it originated in Europe, Africa, and America. It included clowns, or cloons (i.e., country people). ... It was *vulgar*. It spoke its own speech, with a distinctive pronunciation, lexicon, and grammar made up of slang, cant, jargon, and pidgin - talk from work, the street, the prison, the gang, and the dock. It was *planetary*, in its origins, its motions, and its consciousness. Finally, the proletariat was *self-active, creative*; it was - and is - alive; it is onamove.<sup>374</sup>

We can see, there did exist a historical moment of utopian struggles for a egalitarian and common life based on common propriety and common labor in 17<sup>th</sup> century; it was a transitional stage full of contradictions and paradoxes when the Enclosures were just launched and capitalist production had not firmly established its rule all over the world. Is such common life still possible at the stage of late capitalism?

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 36

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 332-333

If world capitalism, or capitalism within one nation, is an uneven structure that articulates both capitalist and non-capitalist components, is it possible to seek for the new common within a mature capitalist society?

If, like Walker says, the impossibility or uncertainty of folding the labor power from “outside” into the “inside” of capitalism indicates the potential shortage of labor power and leads to the ominous scenario of the termination of production circuit of capital, then, in China, the fact that production of labor power is “outsourced” or “externalized” to the countryside indicates greater obstacles for labor power’s re-entering into the production. In fact, the ominous possibility that this labor force produced in the rural “outside” may refuse to “enter” the production circuit of capital is further supported by the “collective land ownership”, which, as part of the “collectivization movement,” has remained to this day. Although, after the dissolution of the agricultural cooperative in 1980s, the village community ceased to be a functional economic body and has been reduced to mere shell, mainly functioning to bind peasant’s permanent residence to the countryside, locking them in the state of “migrant”; however, the land is still collectively-owned, at least in law, it is subject to the governance of all the villagers as a collective (whether it would lead to democracy or corruption depends on the actual practice). Hence, there exists a possibility that the land could be used collectively and productively to generate enough surplus to enable laborers to live self-sufficiently and “delink” from the logic of capital. That is to say, it is possible to rebuild a collective economy to facilitate labor’s “exodus” from capital, which amount to an “undoing” of primitive accumulation, and a return to the “common.”



In the post-Fordist stage of contemporary China, there are two strains of cultural imaginaries and practices of the “commons” in contemporary China. The first strain of “common,” similar to Hardt and Negri’s conceptualization of “the multitude” in the post-Fordist conditions, refers to an open and inclusive political body, formed through chance encounters of multiplicity of singular subjects which reside “within and against” the system. This “multitude” appears in Wang Anyi’s novel *Anonymous* (Ni Ming, 匿名) (2016). However, different from the “multitude” which are produced in the setting of metropolis and enabled by the network of language, knowledge, and information primarily powered by capital-intensive technology, Wang Anyi’s “multitude” are found in the deep mountains, in the remote and underdeveloped small towns that are “de-linked” from the capitalist city and market economy. Wang’s novel probes into the invisible and marginal “worlds” of the anonymous “multitude,” the “useless” people “discarded” or neglected by the mainstream world, and shows us how the various singular subjects, located at different nodes of the network, come into the chance encounter with each other and generate amazing social power that change the course of events.

The second strain of “common,” based on the existing collective land ownership and the past socialist legacy of agricultural cooperatives, tries to imagine an egalitarian and self-sufficient community through cooperative labor. The reality basis for such attempts is the ongoing experiments of “New Co-operative Movement” in the countryside, promoted by the state and participated by intellectuals, college students and peasants. Such literary imagination for “socialist common” consciously inherits and develops upon the socialist canons on collectivization such as Liu Qing’s *The*

*Builders*. Rather than falling “outside” the capital, small peasants seek to combine and organize together, to use the means of production collectively and productively, so as to compete with urban capital and partake the surplus value. For this I will use Liu Jiming’s novel *Human World* (Ren Jing, 人境) (2016) for illustration and the practice of Zhou Village Commune as example.

### ***Anonymous Multitude and the World of Common in Wang Anyi’s Novel***

Wang Anyi is known for her series of Shanghai-themed novels, the most famous of which is *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (Changhenge, 长恨歌). Her nostalgia for pre-1949 old Shanghai has often been labelled as one of the many praises of Shanghai’s glamorous bourgeois modernity. However, many scholars have noted that Wang Anyi is far from an embracer of the dazzling metropolis of post-revolutionary Shanghai in the age of global capitalism; rather, Wang tends to question the grand narrative of “modernization” (be that of “socialist revolutionary modernity” or “bourgeois modernity”) and challenge it with the concrete materiality of mundane everyday life;<sup>375</sup> her nostalgia in fact aims to unearth the “substrata of unofficial histories, intimate life-worlds, and memories of long-duration beneath a mechanical, homogeneous history.”<sup>376</sup> In recent years, Wang has turned her gaze to the everyday life of the underclass people that have been excluded or marginalized by the “mainstream” of “modernization,” such as small producers, vendors, nurse-maids,

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<sup>375</sup> See Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia: Postrevolutionary Allegories in Wang Anyi’s Literary Production in the 1990s,” in *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, vol. 8, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 349-387.

<sup>376</sup> Ban Wang, “Love at Last Sight: Nostalgia, Commodity, and Temporality in Wang Anyi’s *Song of Unending Sorrow*,” in *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Winter 2002), 671.

peasant workers, cobblers, the scrap-collectors, the boatman on Suzhou River, the new immigrants from the countryside of Shanghai. In her novella *Fu Ping* (富萍), written in 2000, she writes about a girl named Fu Ping from the countryside who works as maid in Shanghai. In her name, “Ping” means floating duckweed, while “Fu” means “richness,” hence the name indicates the inner richness of the individual being (a mature subjectivity), even if she is merely a domestic servant. Sensing the alienation while working in the city, this girl finally chose to marry a crippled man in shanty town called Meijia Bridge in the outskirts of Shanghai, as she was touched by the love, dignity, and meaningful human connection among the people in the neighborhood. In 2001, Wang’s novel *Grow Trapa Natans Here and Lotus Root There* (上种红菱下种藕) depicts the experience of a little girl in the small town called Huashe near the big city of Hangzhou. Critic Wang Xiaoming points out, the community of Meijia Bridge and the Huashe Town form a constellation which indicates the dignity and industrious life of ordinary people, and which contests the levelling force of globalization, urbanization, and modernization.<sup>377</sup> In these novels written at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, we could already see Wang’s imagination for a “singular individual,” “multitude,” and “common life” among the underclass people.

This time, in the novel *Anonymous*, Wang Anyi further moves this space of “common life” into the remote mountains far away from the modern city. This novel has a beginning that corresponds to the ending of Fang Fang’s story of Tu Ziqiang, the

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<sup>377</sup> Wang Xiaoming, “Cong Huaihailu dao Meijiaqiao: cong Wang Anyi xiaoshuo chuanguo de zhuanbian tanqi” 从淮海路到梅家桥：从王安忆小说创作的转变谈起 (From Huaihai Road to Meijia Bridge: the Change in Wang Anyi’s novel writing), *Wenxue Pinglun* (Literary Review), no. 3 (2002): 13-14.

becoming “anonymous” of the protagonist. In Fang Fang’s story, the sick and propertyless young man Tu Ziqiang walks into the mountains and disappears from people’s sight, with no one knowing where he has gone, and no one ever seeing him again. Wang Anyi’s novel begins with the protagonist, “he,” a Shanghai citizen, who was kidnapped and “disappeared” from the city, from people’s sight. While in Fang Fang’s story Tu Ziqiang’s disappearing into the mountains indicates his death, in Wang Anyi’s story, the protagonist’s “death” in the city is his “rebirth” in the mountains as a “new human” (hence his name “Old New”), his “becoming anonymous” in one world is his “becoming visible” in another world. As such, Wang’s two-volume novel presents us two worlds. The first world, represented by the international metropolis of Shanghai where “he” used to work and live, is a world of “names” based on labour value and property rights. The second world, hidden in the forests, mountains, the remote villages, and small towns, is the world of the “anonymous multitude.”

What constitutes the “multitude” in Wang Anyi’s novel are the abandoned, the handicapped, the retarded, the gangsters, the sick, the old, who could not produce economic value and hence are “useless” to the capitalist economy. If in modern society one’s “name” is linked with one’s “property rights” (including the rights of labor power), then these people, having no property, are “anonymous” and “outside” the modern order of society which is organized around “property” and the capitalist normality. To this extent, this “motley crowd” fits with the original meaning of “multitude” in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, which refers to “the lowest rank of society and

the propertyless.”<sup>378</sup> The protagonist, especially, is a typical figure of “the anonymous.” In the novel his real proper name remains unknown. In the first world of metropolis, “he” is mistaken as “Wu Baobao,” the boss of the company which “he” worked for; after “he” is “reborn” in the world of the anonymous, he is given the nickname “Old New” (lao xin, 老新).

However, Wang Anyi shows, it is in the modern world of Shanghai, the world of “names” (based on one’s property rights) that the “real being” of a person gets concealed. “He” is kidnapped by the gangs of a debt-collecting company because he is mistaken for as “Wu Baobao,” the real owner of the trading company he works for. And he is recognized as “Wu Baobao” because he leaves his information when he works for the company, using Wu Baobao’s name in receiving and sending packages, signing documents, sending out emails, making phone calls, filling forms; therefore, the information he has left - the address, phone, email – has become his identity (“name”), and fixed him in the order of society as the representative/boss of the company. As such, he is recognized by “name” rather than by person. He is just a “name” in the system; what defines him is a combination of floating markers of numbers and accounts organized around property and his assigned position in the order - his job, his phone number, his name card, his social welfare account, his residence address. Hence, when his wife tries to trace “him” through such identity markers that used to fix him in the system, she finds only “void,” because all of these have now been separated from his corporeal body after he is missing. Figuring out what he had done in the company for the past few months does not help a bit in

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<sup>378</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 40

finding him. “Zimbabwe, the bamboo of Siming mountain, the debt-collecting company, is there really a ‘him’ amid this opened space? How shall she seek him out, from the void he disappears into? .... The void into which he disappears now gets a name, but the name cannot turn the void into substantiality; to the contrary, name is eaten out and turns into void. The power of void is bigger than substantiality.”<sup>379</sup>

Wang shows, such dissociation of “name” and “being” is prevalent in the modern world, rendering everyone “anonymous” and “hidden” under the “names” and fake identities. When the wife searches for Ms. Xiao, the vice general manager of the company, she finds that the phone number listed on Xiao’s name card is an empty number; and the address of her registered residence is also an empty address, a rented apartment where she does not live. The small trading company “he” works for turns out to be only a “shell” which, along with many other branch companies owned by Wu Baobao, functions as a sham to cover Wu’s huge deficit and to trick more loans from the bank. The owner of the company, Wu Baobao, is a mysterious figure that rarely shows himself, giving instructions only through the vice general manager of the company, Ms. Xiao. When “he” got kidnapped, Wu and Xiao both disappeared, and the company soon terminated the lease and moved out. The “friend” (who is a friend of his friend) who had introduced “him” to this job also lost contact and turned his phone off. The novel tell us, the boss’s runaway and the close-down of the company is cause by the failure of speculative investment due to the financial crisis in 2008.

Clearly, Wang Anyi has touched upon the highly precarious and flexible conditions of post-Fordist capitalism characterized by the rapid circulation of migrants

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<sup>379</sup> Wang Anyi, *Niming* 匿名 (Anonymous), (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2016), 172.

and money. In such a world, every individual being is instrumentally integrated into the order of money, becoming “anonymous,” lost in the numerous titles, hence losing his distinctiveness as a human being. People get to know each only by their “titles” and “names” (name cards, telephone contact, address), instead of by the concrete contact with the real persons. The author tells us, “the missing population in this city (of Shanghai) is so huge. On average, every minute there is someone disappearing.”<sup>380</sup> And “every minute, how many companies are cancelling their registration and disappearing, just like the disappearing population every minute.”<sup>381</sup> The “fake” company that “he” works for rented an office in a residential building, in which the short-lived small companies kept move in and out all the time. The management staff of the building watch the inhabitants coming and going before their eyes everyday, receiving and sending packages for them without the slightest idea about who they are and what they are doing.<sup>382</sup> Ms. Xiao’s residential address on her name card, too, is a rented apartment, located in a subaltern shanty-town packed with self-built houses, where migrant tenants “come today and go tomorrow, highly mobile, with nobody knowing anybody.” “Many of the houses are subleased to the tenants through double and triple rounds, without knowing who is the real owner.”<sup>383</sup>

However, Wang seems to suggest, the fundamental reason for the person’s missing, derives not just from the post-Fordist economy in specific, but lies in the “stranger society” (“Gesellschaft”) in general, in which the relation between individual human beings is organized and formed around market relations. Such relation

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 48

grounded in “names” and “titles,” Wang seems to suggest, is highly unstable and unreliable, just like the flickering economic conditions. In other words, people’s anonymous state of being derive from their identity of “disposable worker,” which can be easily replaced by others. In the first world, all these “identity markers” in the order are “empty” and do not point to the real person, and the social relation founded on these “names” is also “empty” relation without substantial meaning. The real meaningful social relation, rather, comes from the “informal” relation that is concealed beneath the “titles” on the name card, not registered by the official institutional naming system, and not defined in terms of titles and property. For example, when the wife searches for Ms. Xiao according to the contact on her name card – the officially and institutionally registered personal information, the “name” that “fixes” Ms. Xiao in the system – what she found is only “void” - empty phone, empty address. It is only through the face-to-face personal association with the subaltern immigrants living in the shanty town that she gets to connect with Xiao as a real person. And these social connections are often generated by random encounters. Through the help of Coach Liu, a stranger who she accidentally bumped into when he was helping the “fake” company move out, the wife managed to get the contact of Xiao from the rental agency; through a chance chat with the Henan shop-owner living in the shanty town, she got to know Old Ge, who governed the all the rented houses in this area; finally, it was Old Ge who brought Ms. Xiao to her. Hence, these strangers of different backgrounds constitute the “multitude”; they are connected to each other not through their occupations, not through their assigned position in the capitalist system determined by their utilitarian function, but through the non-utilitarian associations as “friends,” formed in their face-



to-face encounters. In this sense, they are indeed “an open, inclusive social body, characterized by its boundlessness and its originary state of mixture among social ranks and groups.”<sup>384</sup> The relation between these singularities, through chance encounters and not registered by the institution of “property,” is the real social relation.

In the second world, Wang pictures several worlds that are “hidden” “in the cracks between civilizations,” “at the back” of the normal world, worlds that are “de-linked” from the world dominated by the logic of market and the state. Already in her novel *Outlaws Everywhere* (遍地梟雄) in 2005, Wang Anyi has touched upon the nonymous and hidden world of outlaws and gangsters, telling the story of how a young taxi driver who was kidnapped by three gangsters ended up liking their way of life and running with them, which, albeit vagrant, is full of friendship and mutual-aid. In *Anonymous*, Wang Anyi further characterizes numerous “anonymous worlds” inhabited by “nameless outlaws,” delinked from the mainstream world. Among them is the deserted village hidden in deep forest, called “Forest Cave,” where “he” (Old New) was dumped by the kidnappers to starve to death after they found out he was the wrong hostage. Located in the intersection of three provinces with primitive conditions of production, this village used to thrive with illegal bazaars outside the governance of the government. After the market economy drove the inhabitants out for employment, this deserted village “disappeared from map and administrative division.”<sup>385</sup> Another “hidden” world is the under-developed tiny town called “Nine Feet,” which accommodated only the weak and the old, as well as outsiders and

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<sup>384</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 40

<sup>385</sup> Wang, *Niming*, 160.

immigrants from various places, while deserted by the capable people going out for employment. The vitality of this little town exudes from its “half-deserted, half-utilized” status; it thrived through informal economy, including illegal trades and pirated goods: the hair salon are doing the business of the brothel; at the back of the clothing store are the chemically-processed garments recycled from who-knows-where; the dentists in the private clinics act like butchers stained with blood all over the robe, pulling the bad teeth from the patient’s mouth. “Car stores are filled with stolen cars, what fill in the Nike sneakers are coarse paper and plastic, the famous star appearing on the banner are fake, and god knows whether he/she will appear or not! Drainage oil, meat from dead pigs, and big white buns steamed with brimstone, that is what constitutes the storefront of the old street. Its prosperity grows out from the decadence, thrives on the deviation, providing a more self-sufficient livelihood than those institutionally endorsed by the government.”<sup>386</sup>

The inhabitants of this “anonymous” world are gangsters, the dumb, the retarded, villagers, widow, the old, the paralyzed, the abandoned child born with a congenital heart disease, the handicapped. These are subjects that are “singular,” “abnormal,” unproductive, excluded from the mainstream of the society, and hence have no identity based on property rights. They “do not have names, and only call each other by nicknames,” because, born in the wild or abandoned by their family, they come from “nowhere,” and “are not properly born and raised by father or mother.”<sup>387</sup> The two places that accommodate Old New, are a temporary rest home in the small town of “Nine Feet,” and a welfare house in the small county, which accommodate all the

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 229.

“useless” people that are unable to produce any economic value and abandoned by the society. The welfare house are full of people who are inflicted with all kinds of rare diseases and physical defects, such as palatoschisis, brain paralysis, retarded, senium praecox, while the rest home accommodates a widow, a vagrant old man found on the street, a paralyzed person in bed, a sick child found abandoned with congenital heart disease, and Old New who has lost all “memory of his name, age, birthplace, occupation, and family.”<sup>388</sup> Since the temporary rest home lies outside the state’s welfare system, this motley group with no laboring capability scrape by by leasing out a small plot of land to immigrants, raising some poultry, and at times receiving some donations and aid from the neighborhood. The clothes they wear are donated by the clothes factory; they get some free food from time to time from vendors while walking on the street; the mill grounds their grains for free, and at times give them some vegetables; at times the neighbor would give them some hawthorn, which they would make into sugared hawthorn and exchange for some money on the street. In a word, the livelihood of this small group “lies outside the economic body of the small town and in the heart and morality of the neighborhood.”<sup>389</sup>

The connection between these singular subjects in the second world, is not predetermined and arranged according to the logic of capital and institution of the state; rather, it is formed through the seemingly irrelevant and non-utilitarian encounters, and sustained by the desire to help each other. The dumb was found starving and abandoned on the street by the gang master Pock Monk; the child with heart disease was picked up by the hospital after he was abandoned by his parents and was then sent

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 232.

to the rest home; Old New, who had passed out on the field after escaping from a forest fire, was taken in by a village family, and through the brother of the retarded Er Dian whom he accidentally bumped into in the forest, was transferred to the town Nine Feet. Interesting, it was in the process of helping the sick child to receive heart surgery in Shanghai that Old New, long lost in the mountains and forests, came into contact again with his family in Shanghai and returned to the modern world. The cooperative effort of “sending the sick child for heart surgery” hence has connected together a multiplicity of subjects of different walks: the retarded Er Dian, gangster Pock Monk, his assistant Dumb, the police chief of a tiny police station in Nine Feet, gangster Dun Mu, the Albino boy in the welfare house, a volunteer in Shanghai, and the young policeman in the county’s police station. If Hardt and Negri’s network of “common” is based on the capitalist mode of production and facilitated by capital, then Wang Anyi’s “multitude” and “common” is found in the remote countryside and small towns that are “de-linked” from the modern society; they are “the hidden small worlds that cannot be integrated into the common sense.”<sup>390</sup> It is precisely in these remote, backward, and under-developed areas “in the cracks between civilizations” and “delinked” from the modern society that a real social relation between singular human beings become possible. This anonymous world is exactly the world of “common” imagined by Wang Anyi.

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 380.

### ***Reconstructing a Human World: Imagining New Cooperative in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

If Wang Anyi places her imagination for “the common” on the anonymous “multitudes” of ordinary people in the “hidden” worlds “delinked” from the mainstream modern society, then Liu Jiming’s novel *Human World* (Ren Jing, 人境) (2016) tries to reactivate the socialist legacy of collectivization, and to develop a common way of life on the basis of the new agrarian co-operative in the countryside.

The novel must be understood against the background of the “New Co-operative” Movement promoted by Chinese government and the state’s huge financial investment in the countryside for “Construction of New Countryside” (新农村建设) in recent years. With the continuing outflow of rural population into the city, the decay of rural economy, and the fundamental collapse of ethical and cultural order in the countryside, the central government has paid increasing attention to the “three rural issues” (i.e. issues of peasants, rural areas, as well as literature). The state cancelled agricultural taxes in January 2006, forbidding local township and county government to extract any more fees and taxes from peasantry; instead, the financial budget of local township government would be provided by the state. The state also started to provide subsidies for peasants who grew food on the land, as a way to encourage agricultural production. Besides, the state has been investing billions of dollars to improve the basic infrastructure in the rural areas, building roads and installing electricity, running water, and telecommunication networks in each natural village. From 2003 to 2007, the financial investment of Central Government on “three rural

issues” have totaled 1.56 trillion *yuan*, increasing at the rate of 17% per year.<sup>391</sup> The state has also made various efforts to foster the cooperative economy in rural areas. In 2006, the “Law of the People's Republic of China on Farmers’ Professional Cooperatives” was passed, encouraging individual peasants to ally together into economic organization.

On one hand, as Walker suggests, we can understand these measures as the state’s attempt to fulfill its function as a “biopower” to “care for” the well-being of population and sustain their life so as to secure for capital a stable supply of labor power. To some extent, this can be understood as what Kalyan Sanyal calls as “developmental governance.” According to Sanyal, “developmental governance” prioritizes “need, entitlement, and capability” of population over economic development.<sup>392</sup> For Sanyal, the example of “developmental governance” is India’s anti-poverty programs in the 1970s, which “aimed at improving the condition of small and marginal farmers on the one hand, and creating employment opportunities for the landless agricultural laborers and artisans, on the other.” The measures included providing for peasants “sources of irrigation, implements for farming in the small and marginal farms, animals for dairy and animal husbandry as non-farm activities and tools and training for artisans in cottage industries and handicrafts,” as well as launching nutritious programs for vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, nursing mothers and children.<sup>393</sup> Sanyal point out, to some extent, such measures of developmental governance amounts to a reversal of the logic of capitalist primitive

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<sup>391</sup> Chen Xiwen, et. al. *Zhongguo Nongcun Gaige Sanshinian Huigu yu Zhanwang*, 455.

<sup>392</sup> Kalyan Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-colonial Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2007), 180

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

accumulation, as it redistributes a part of the surplus generated in the capitalist sector to the poor.

On the other hand, the state's financial investment in rural areas can also be seen as a means to solve the problem of "over-accumulation." According to David Harvey, each capitalist state would ultimately face the crisis of overaccumulation, "a condition where surpluses of capital (perhaps accompanied by surpluses of labor) lie idle with no profitable outlets in sight."<sup>394</sup> When over-accumulation occurs, capital needs to find an outlet elsewhere for productive and profitable investment in order to avoid devaluation, otherwise the "overaccumulated capital stands to be devalued directly through the onset of deflationary recession or depression."<sup>395</sup> According to Harvey, the over-accumulated surplus capital can be absorbed internally either through geographical adjustment or social expenditures (such as education, medication) which requires long-term investment,<sup>396</sup> and "the internal role of class relations and of class struggle, and the particular pattern of class alliances that is constructed within the state" play a crucial role in determining which method is to be used to solve overaccumulation.<sup>397</sup> While in some capitalist states, the reactionary bourgeoisie are reluctant to give up its privileges and tend to resort to imperialist expansion to solve overaccumulation, some other states, where progressive class forces are stronger, may prefer to use the surplus capital to "improve social and physical infrastructures for production and consumption at home."<sup>398</sup> For Harvey, China has now reached the

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<sup>394</sup> Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 149.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 116

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 117

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 126-127

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 126

stage of overaccumulation, and its huge expenditure on building basic infrastructures such as roads, bridges, and airports served exactly to “absorb their vast labor surpluses (and to curb the threat of social unrest).”<sup>399</sup>

Under the stress of the overaccumulation of capital, China’s rural area, as the “non-capitalist” sector where private capital has thus far been unable to penetrate, now has become the target of various kinds of surplus capital (private capital, transnational capital, and state capital), which seek to invest in the rural area and make profit. If, as Harvey says, “the internal role of class relations and of class struggle, and the particular pattern of class alliances that is constructed within the state” determines the method for solving the overaccumulation,<sup>400</sup> then, as a state that has the socialist tradition, the Chinese state is playing a complex role in arbitrating between different class forces. On one hand, there are increasing demands on the part of bourgeois capitalists to abolish the collective land ownership and turn land into private property, allowing land to be bought and sold on the market, so that capitalists can buy land from peasants for investment in land and agriculture. On the other hand, some leftist intellectuals who are concerned about the conditions of peasants have been arguing against this option, pointing out that a huge rural proletariat without land would be a source of instability for the Chinese society.<sup>401</sup>

Wen Tiejun proposes that the central government should invest the surplus capital in the construction of social and physical infrastructure of the countryside, to improve the overall welfare of the rural population in the fields of medical care,

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 126-127

<sup>401</sup> See He, *Diqian de Luoji*.



education, and pension system, as a way to absorb the overaccumulated capital.<sup>402</sup> He points out, China's remaining collective ownership (as remainder of the socialist collectivization) constitutes the peculiar form of "small holders community economy," a closed community within which the property (land and natural resources) can be retained and shared by all members, instead of flowing out and being traded on the market as commodity.<sup>403</sup> This, according to Wen, could be utilized as a favorite condition to develop cooperative economy in the rural areas. Wen suggests the urban private capital should be precluded from entering the rural community; rather, all productive funds should come from community members themselves and retained within the community. If the peasants do not have enough money, the state should provide the start-up funds (capital investment) for the community economy, and retain the returns of investment inside the cooperative economy, to be used as the next round of investment.<sup>404</sup> Also, Wen proposes the state to open lucrative occupations to peasants cooperatives instead of monopolizing them with the state or private enterprise, such as the supply of raw materials, storage and transportation of agricultural products, processing industry, agricultural finance, insurance, etc..<sup>405</sup> Wen's proposal of "small holders' community economy" amounts to the construction of a semi-autonomous economic organization "delinked" from the urban capital, an economic body that is not only self-sufficient but also capable of producing surplus.

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<sup>402</sup> Wen Tiejun, "Tudi gaige yu zhongguo chengzhenhua," 土地改革与中国城镇化 (Land reform and China's urbanization), in *Xiaochengzhen Jianshe* 小城镇建设 (Development of Small Cities and Towns), no. 8 (2015): 24.

<sup>403</sup> Wen, *Sannong Wenti yu Shiji Fansi*, 92-93.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

Some other scholars, such as Pun Ngai, looks back to the socialist legacy of collective land ownership for useful resources, in the hope of rebuilding a functional collective economy to keep labor force on the land. Pun's study of Zhoujiazhuang Commune, which has retained the basic form of agrarian co-operative even after the mass abolishment of People's Communes after Cultural Revolution, shows that socialist cooperative is still capable of producing surplus value and providing for the welfare of its members. As of 2009, the Zhoujiazhuang Commune had 21046 *mou* (about 3507 acres) of land, 4495 households, 13029 residents. As a comprehensive economic unit that integrates both agricultural department and industrial department, its production activities include traditional crop planting such as wheat, corn, grains, and beans, while running a commercial orchard, a valve factory and a printing plant. As such, the commune has managed to keep nearly all its population on the land, with very few laborers drifting into the city. Despite the disparity of revenues generated by different departments, the commune has stuck to a relatively egalitarian way of redistribution of income between different departments. The surplus value has been basically retained within the community and divided among all members, rather than flow into the urban sector. After taking out 7% to be used for "public accumulative fund" and 3% for "public welfare fund," about up to 86% of surplus would be distributed among cooperative members. Hence, cooperative members live a relatively well-off life. The aged members earn as much as 25000-28000 *yuan* per year, while young people working in collective enterprise earn 30000 to 35000 *yuan* per year. With its independent collective funds, the commune set up its own welfare system. It provides free education from elementary schools to junior middle school. The

commune provides subsistence for aged people over 65 years old, and send staff to look after them, covering their fees of medication, and giving them monthly allowance. For those who suffer great illness and need medical treatment in the city, the commune will provide subsidies depending on their economic conditions. Besides, the commune undertook its own infrastructure construction, installing running water for the entire area, and building residence house in a unified manner.<sup>406</sup> At any rate, Pun's study of Zhoujiazhuang Commune has demonstrated the vibrancy of a socialist co-operative in the contemporary age, a collective and productive way of production that benefits the rural community, with all its members entitled to the collective surplus, instead of decentralizing into migrants drifting into the city.

*Human World* must be placed within this context of the efforts of left-leaning intellectual to revive the socialist tradition of collectivization. In fact, the writer Liu Jiming (刘继明) is one of the New Left intellectuals who hold a critical attitude towards the marketization and developmentalism after 1990s, and one of the main advocates of "Underclass Literature" around its emergence in 2004. Having majored in Chinese literature and graduated from the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Wuhan University, Liu is familiar with the socialist literary canons and is well-informed about the intellectual trends in contemporary China, including the debate between liberalists and New Leftists in 1990s. Reading widely in political economics, history, and sociology, he is well-informed about the socio-economic issues of Chinese society. Compared to other writers, Liu has not produced many

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<sup>406</sup> Pun Ngai, "Zhoujiazhuang: Renmin Gongshe Yichan de Xinqishi." 周家庄：人民公社遗产的新启示 ("Zhoujiazhuang: New Inspiration of Legacy of People's Commune"), in Pun Ngai, Yan Hairong, Gu Xuebin, Gu Jinghua, ed. *Shenhui Jingji zai Zhongguo* 社会经济在中国 (Social Economy in China: Beyond the Imagination of Capitalism). Beijing: shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2014.

fictional works; before *Human World*, he mainly publishes social criticisms and reportage literature that concerns about contemporary Chinese society. Hence, Liu is a scholar, a critic, and a writer. Like most New Left intellectuals, Liu is critical of the dramatic political and economic changes taken place in China throughout the 1990s, including the waves of marketization and privatization in 1990s, mass lay-off of state-owned factory workers, commercialization and marginalization of literature, the prevalent corruption of government officials who allied with capital, and the pauperization of peasants and migrant workers. Especially, with his peasant background, Liu has paid consistent attention to the “three rural issues,” writing intermittently about the change in his hometown village.

In literature, Liu is a firm supporter and main proponent of the trend of “underclass literature.” He participated in the discussion of “underclass literature” on the magazine of *Frontier* in 2005, right around the time when “underclass literature” began to appear. In his article “How Do We Narrate Underclass,” he appreciates the “underclass literature” not only for its exposing of the social contradictions and its straightforward representation of the cruel reality, but also for its willingness to speak for the interest of underclass.<sup>407</sup> Liu criticizes, due to the stigmatization of socialism and realist literature after 1990s, writers have refrained from describing the reality in a realist manner and have become increasingly obsessed with the experiment of pure aesthetic forms or immersed in trivial personal feelings. Literature since 1990s has turned “inward” to the description of trivial personal desires and has lost the ability to capture or conceptualize the major changes in Chinese society, which has resulted in

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<sup>407</sup> Liu Jiming, “Women zenyang xushu diceng?” 我们怎样叙述底层 (How do we narrate underclass?), *Tianya* 天涯 (Frontier), no. 5, 2005: 34-40.

the marginalization of literature. He calls people to look back on the realist tradition of socialist literature for supporting resources to reconstruct a “New Left Literature.”<sup>408</sup>

*Human World* can thus be seen as an attempt to actualize Liu’s ideal for a “New Left Literature.” The novel was published in 2016, but the writing of this novel started as early as 1995, and Liu’s thoughts for this novel have been fundamentally shaped by the series changes taken place in Chinese society during the past two decades.<sup>409</sup> In terms of content and aesthetic style, this consciously models itself after the socialist realist novels, including Liu Qing’s *The Builders*. It tells a story of how the intellectual Ma La, after suffering setbacks in the city, returns to the countryside and rebuilds a community life together with other peasants by founding and running professional agricultural cooperative.

To some extent, this novel is basically a literary illustration of the theoretical framework of New Leftist intellectuals about how to reconstruct the countryside through the founding of “New Co-operative,” a romanticized projection of New Leftist intellectuals’ utopian ideals about the “new common life”. Characters in the novel represent different class identities, and their contradictions and interactions are codified in such a way as to serve as metaphors of the struggles of different social forces in contemporary Chinese society. Ma La stands for the generation of intellectuals who swing between the socialist tradition of 1950s-1970s and the post-1980s developmentalism, and who, now disillusioned with the cruelty of capitalism, start seeking for a “third road” in cooperation. The two different roads of “socialism”

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<sup>408</sup> See Liu Jiming, Kuang Xinnian, “Xinzuoyi wenxue yu dangxia sixiang jingkuang” 新左翼文学与当下思想境况 (New left literature and contemporary intellectual condition), in *Huanghe Wenxue* 黄河文学 (Yellow River Literature), no. 3, 2007.

<sup>409</sup> Liu Jiming, “Epilogue,” *Renjing* 人境 (Human World) (Beijing: Zuo jia chubanshe, 2016), 490.

and “capitalism” are symbolized by Ma La’s two spiritual leaders in his childhood and youthhood. One is his brother Ma Ke, who stands for the pure and passionate socialist ideals of collectivism, a bygone socialist tradition which has been buried together with Cultural Revolution; and the other spiritual leader is Lu Yongjia, his instructor in college and a liberal intellectual who threw himself into business and gained huge success, but finally ended up broke and died of AIDS due to his collusion with corrupted officials and his indulgence in the hedonist life-style. On the other hand, former commune leader Ding Changshui stands for the living tradition of socialist collectivization and which is a support force of “New Cooperative Movement,” while his son Ding Youpeng, the current mayor of the Yanhe County, stands for regional bureaucrats who prioritize economic growth and cater to capital investment in disregard of social costs. Gu Chaoyang, son of a retired high-ranked party cadre, works for the transnational biological corporation, represents the most vicious collaboration of the privileged bureaucratic class and transnational capital. As such, the novel set up a series of binaries: socialist assets vs. transnational capital, corrupted bureaucrats vs. old revolutionaries, liberal intellectuals vs. left-leaning intellectuals.

Through such binaries, Liu presents us two “worlds” in the novel, the “human’s world” and the “capital’s world.” The “human’s world,” in contrast to “capital’s world,” has several meanings. In terms of agriculture, it is to develop eco-agriculture free of toxic pesticides and chemical fertilizers, instead of developing capitalist-intensive modern agriculture and growing the genetically modified crops developed by transnational agribusiness. In terms of culture, it is to form an egalitarian and cooperative community among small peasants to help each other through difficulty,

instead of being crushed under the force of market as vulnerable individuals. In terms of academic research, it is to stress the value of “human” and to concern for the social, cultural, political values instead of focusing solely on the economic value and serving the utilitarian purpose of economic growth.

The novel is suffused with nostalgic sentiments of for the collective economy in socialist period. The two volumes of the novel respectively focuses on two protagonists, the intellectual-turned-peasant Ma La and sociologist Murong Qiu, who are both connected to Ma Ke, Ma La’s brother and Murong’s lover, who lost his life while trying to salvage seeds of the commune from the fire of the storehouse in 1970s. The 1970s, the period of socialist collectivization and People’s Commune, stands for Ma La the innocent childhood filled with heroic dreams, and stands for Murong the passionate youthhood of romantic love and socialist idealism. When Ma La drives the tractor along the river, he feels like “he is lingering between the past and the present,” “as if his body was turning small bit by bit, turning into a boy of two or three years old.”<sup>410</sup> And Murong, who buried her ideals and passion deep inside her heart after Ma Ke died, when visiting the village again, saw the image of the girl “wearing a green student uniform, with two braids, running and jumping on the grass on the riverside.”<sup>411</sup> Their nostalgia for the youth and childhood in the 1970s, along with its passion and idealism, is in essence the nostalgia for a bygone socialist tradition.

Such nostalgia is not only seen on the two protagonists who are related to the martyr Ma Ke, but is also seen in the old cadres who used to work for the People’s Commune in the socialist period, who retained a vivid memory of the socialist

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<sup>410</sup> Liu, *Renjing*, 120.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 476.

collectivization, and is the embodiment of the socialist legacy of collectivization that survived to this day and could be reactivated as supporting resources to transform the capitalist reality. The former leader of People's Commune Ding Changshui feels "hot blooded" whenever he recalls the period when "the countryside was full of young people," and "girls and boys were singing while having a labor contest," and "the field was filled with the bustling noises of people and the neighing of horses."<sup>412</sup> On the other hand, in the memory of the former co-operative chief Guo Dawan, the construction site was filled with large crowds of laboring people, "flags were flying," and "singing and speech on loud speakers" were all over the construction site; tractors were competing each other in contest. Thinking of the lively scene of collective labor, the seventy-year old Guo Dawan feels his aged heart starts to beat strongly as if he were young again.<sup>413</sup>

In contrast to the lively scene of collective labor of People's Commune during Cultural Revolution, the countryside now is characterized by a desolate and dreary view: the rugged and muddy road resulted from the lack of maintenance (due to the shortage of funds after the dissolution of collective economy), the dried-up aqueducts, the deserted fields overgrown with weeds abandoned by peasants who migrated into the city as wage-laborer, the stinking river; there were only a few skinny trees, and not a bird in the sky. No youth in the village, only old people and children.<sup>414</sup> Now, standing at the beginning of the 21 century, thirty years after the Cultural Revolution ended and the People's Commune disintegrated, their personal nostalgia points to the

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 29.



intention and effort of recovering and reactivating the legacy of socialist collectivization. To be more specific, they hope to rebuild a community and found a new cooperative.

When depicting the activities and characters of the cooperative, Liu Jiming clearly and deliberately echoes Liu Qing's canonical novel on collectivization *The Builders* in many respects, showing the clear attempt of re-activating living tradition of socialist collectivization of the 1950s and 1960s. For example, like Liang Shengbao's socialist co-operative, the founding members of Ma La's co-operative were impoverished peasants who could not even pool enough money to form the starting funds for the co-operative, and just like Sheng-pao who advanced his money to buy seeds for the poor members of the mutual-aid team, Ma La donated 10000 *yuan* into the co-operative to be used as founding funds. And just like Sheng-pao's travelling to the neighboring county to buy the high-quality rice seeds, Ma La and his loyal follower Gu Yu travelled to another province to buy the experimental seeds from an institute of agricultural science. And just as the poor peasant Gao Zengfu is a loyal follower of Liang Shengbao, the handicapped Gu Yu also becomes the most loyal student of Ma La and acts as a deputy of the cooperative, running from household to household to organize peasants.

The most essential character the new cooperative inherits from the socialist commune is the ethics of egalitarianism and mutual aid. Not unlike Liang Shengbao's socialist cooperative, this cooperative in its founding stage consisted of the "weakest" members in the village: a former criminal Ma La (who had been put to prison for his involuntary involvement in an economic crime), the handicapped Gu Yu (who had

three fingers cut off in an accident while working as a migrant worker in the city), a middle-aged widow Aunt Hu (whose husband died from a fall from high rise while working as a construction worker in the city), and a fifty-year-old man Cao Guangjin (who is left with his wife to plow the land alone while his son works in the city). In other words, they are like a motley bunch of “multitude”, in the sense that they are a mixed body of underprivileged people.

However, it is from this motley group that the lonely and lost intellectual Ma La regains the sense of “family” and “community”:

He no longer considers himself as a cynical, self-pitied, melancholic, and solitary person who lacks a sense of belonging. He is like a person who had once left home and now is back in the crowd. This crowd is no longer the crowd [in the collectivization period]; but precisely because of this, he has the feeling of rebirth, especially when he discusses about the co-operative with Gu Yu couple, Uncle Dawan, Aunt Hu, Cao Guangjin. In the past, these people were polite and distanced from him, treating him as an ‘outsider’; now they have taken him as one of them, treating him as family, which he could tell from their unrestrained and amiable manner of talking to him. This is the feeling of home. He likes this feeling. It is warming, amiable, and intoxicating, and arouses certain sense of responsibility that has been buried deep in his heart. He feels, living is no longer the issue of individual himself, but has unknown relation to the people around him and the village he grew up with.<sup>415</sup>

However, we must not think that such connection to the village is an “organic” and “unreflective” relation to the environment, like the undivided relation to the clan community in premodern societies. Rather, Ma La and his family, in essence, were immigrants and “outsiders” to the village. Losing his fisherman father in a flood, Ma La and his family fled from the flooded town and lived a vagrant life until they settled down in this village. As “outsiders,” they were taken in by the People’s Commune as its members and integrated into its productive activities, living in the warehouse that

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 193.

the cooperative emptied for them. In other words, Ma La's (as well as his brother Ma Ke's) relation to the village is not a pre-given, pre-determined relation determined by one's blood, but is a truly social relation, a relation which welcomes and accepts "others," formed through the co-operative and People's Commune. After his mother died in an accident and his brother sacrificed himself in the fire, the orphan Ma La was taken care of by the chief of the co-operative, Uncle Dawan; and from middle school to college, Ma La's living expenses and tuition were provided by the collective funds of the commune. Hence, in essence, Ma La's emotional attachment to the village is not an "organic" and "unreflective," but is mediated by the real social relation forged under People's Commune and infused with the socialist ethics of mutual aid.

It is worth noting that in the socialist literature of rural collectivization, the protagonist who led the peasants and founded the co-operative, tend to be immigrants that are not born in this village, such as Liang Sheng-pao in *The Builders* and Xiao Changchun in *Sunny Days*. In other words, it is a tradition of novels of socialist collectivization to tone down the one's predetermined "organic" blood relation to one's residential village, and to highlight the social relation based subjectivity and class consciousness. Liu's novel also repeats this theme - the social relation formed between unrelated strangers transcends blood relation of family. Whereas in Mao's period, such "social relation" indicates "class relation," in this novel such social relation points to a more open and more diverse association between singular subjects.

Just as Ma La's relation to the village was not founded on blood, the "family" that Ma La set up after he came back and settled down in the village was also a "motley" bunch of singular individuals that had no blood relations to each other. As a

forty-year-old bachelor, Ma La lives with an orphan boy and a girl drug addict. These three persons, who have no blood relations, live like a family. The fifteen-year orphan, Little Limpy, after losing his father in an coal mine accident and abandoned by his mother at the age of seven, has been living an unstable life through leasing his land he leased to his rich uncle, and has owed large sum of debts due to his involvement in gambling. While his uncle, the rich farmer Zhao Guangfu, refused to give the nephew any help, Ma La took him in after he found this boy beaten almost to death by debt-collectors, and looked after him for weeks. Meanwhile, knowing nothing about cooking, Ma La received assistance from the members of the cooperative: the couple of Gu Yu killed a hen and prepared chicken soup; Uncle Dawan sent in pork feet; Aunt Hu brought him a basket of red dates; even the most stingy person, Cao Guangjin, gave a small bag of sticky rice; the barefoot doctor in the village dropped by from time to time to check his body and give him injections. When Little Limpy got better, he stayed with Ma La, who was surprised to find that Little Limpy was a good cook. As such, they started living together. Another member of the “family,” the seventeen-year-old girl Tang Cao’er, was the daughter of Ma La’s deceased teacher Lu Yongjia. Lacking care from her mother and her stepfather, Tang got into various bad habits in the city, and was drugged and raped while she was performing for a disco hall, and ended up a drug-addict. After Ma La bailed her out from the prison, and treated her drug addition, Tang treated him as her father. As such, the three persons of heterogeneous backgrounds – a bachelor, an orphan, and a drug-addict – started to live together like a “family.” What we see here is the forming of a real social relation of the “common.”

The new co-operative not only symbolizes the restoration of the bygone socialist tradition of mutual-aid and egalitarianism, but also stands for a type of “eco-agriculture” in which human beings live in harmony with nature. Ma La’s new co-operative grows organic rice without using fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. Instead of using pesticide, they use the new technology of insect repellent lanterns, and use little animals in the garden to eliminate the pests rather than pesticides. They grow their own vegetables in the yard, eating the strawberries and kiwi fruit picked directly from their gardens. They raise their own pigs and use its manure to fertilize the crops and produce gas to power the electricity for the house. This ecological agriculture relies on the updated scientific knowledge and information of the market, gained from newspapers and the internet, thanks to the state’s financial investment in infrastructures in rural areas. Clearly, the novel places itself in the background of the state’s projects of “New Co-operative Movement” and “Construction of New Countryside,” and stresses the importance of the state’s policy support.

In contrast to this ecological mode of agriculture, Liu criticizes the highly commercialized and capital-intensive mode of agriculture that heavily relies on fertilizers, pesticides, and genetically-modified seeds, backed by the transnational corporation “Duke Company,” which metaphorically stands for the infamous Monsanto Company in reality. Having sold genetic-modified beans, cotton, and corns to Latin America, Southeast Asia, and India, this huge corporation has established its leading status on the global seed market, making huge profit out of the seeds, pesticides and fertilizers it sells to these countries. Now, turning to the not-yet-capitalized rural area of China, the vacuum zone of capital, it tries to sell the seeds

which have been genetically modified to Chinese peasants at cheaper price. At the same time, it tries to purchase the devalued assets of state-owned enterprises when they were undergoing massive bankruptcy, and runs a chemical plant that produces fertilizers and pesticides and cause hazards to the neighborhood's health, to the extent that it caused protests and riots outside the government.

Hence in the novel we see the struggle between the agricultural cooperative and the transnational Company, between the eco-agriculture and the capitalist-intensive agriculture; the former stands for "human's world", while the latter stands for "capital's world." The business representative of Duke Company, Gu Chaoyang, is a descendant of a prestigious cadre, and despite his father being an old revolutionary loyal to Mao's socialism, the son uses the political power and political resources of his father to manipulate the policy of local government to serve the interest of his transnational corporation. Colluding with him are other descendants of the cadres and the local government official who, for the sake of more revenues, try to attract capital investment and provides favorable conditions for big enterprises, to the extent that they even organize police to suppress the protesting crowd against the poisonous chemical emissions. On the other hand, the academic sphere is also driven by the anxiety to search for more funding to support academic activities, and even seek to cooperate with large corporation and government. What we see here is the penetration of money relations in every corner, as well as the collaboration of government, enterprise, and even academic circle. The novel has a tragic ending: the polluting chemical plant is going to relocate to the village where Ma La lives. Under the

pressure of capital and the local government, the entire village had to abandon the land and and relocated to another town, leading to the disintegration of the co-operative.

At any rate, the story is more of New Left's theoretical conceptualization of the Chinese society rather than a realist depiction of what is happening in Chinese society. Since it sticks to the "New Left" position that praises the socialism and criticizes bureaucrats and global capitalism, it somewhat simplifies the complex historical reality. For example, it romanticizes the period of Cultural Revolution by its nostalgic depiction of the lively scene of collective labor during this period, whereas in actual reality, by the time of 1970s, due to the decades-long extraction of surplus products and the resultant poverty of peasants, collectivization has already lost its vitality and shown the signs of decay, let alone the military conflicts and factional struggles taken place during Cultural Revolution. Although the rosy picture that Liu depicts for the socialist history undermines its intellectual power, nevertheless, it can be seen as an attempt of New Left intellectuals to construct an utopian narrative about the alternative path of China, a political statement of the "new common" in the form of literature.

### ***Conclusion***

While the non-capitalist sector of small holdership created an "outside," onto which capital "externalizes" the cost of reproduction of labor, the structural separation of production of labor power and the usage of labor power by the rural-urban divide increases the danger of labor power's "exodus" from the capitalist sector. While Marxists in the West seek the re-construction of the "common" from within capitalism,

in China, the not-fully-capitalized countryside, along with the remaning socialist legacy of collective land ownership, provides the theoretical possiblity for reconstructing a common life.

Not surprisingly, Wang Anyi's *Anonymous* and Liu Jiming's *Human World*, though presenting two different ways of imagining the "common," both set their story in the countryside or remote mountains, far away from the city, demonstrating the idea of a "delinking world" from capitalism. While Wang Anyi imagines the "common connection" between singular individuals of drastically different backgrounds formed through their non-utilitarian chance encounters, the New Left intellectual Liu Jiming consciously connects the ideal of "common" life with the socialist tradition of collectivization and agricultural co-operative. On the other hand, the reality base for the reconstruction of the "common" is the "New Co-operative Movement" and the "Construction of New Countryside" undertaken by the Central Government, which is making huge investment onto the construction of infrastructures and welfare system in the countryside, to improve the livelihood of rural population, as well as to relieve the pressure of overaccumulation of capital. As such~, with New Left intellectuals' pushing the state towards a more progressive policy towards te countryside, the "common" seems to find its actualization in both cultural imagination and practice.



## CONCLUSION

“Commune,” the premodern social formation characterized by the indistinctiveness of individual from the community, has been regarded by Marx as an alternative to the capitalist modernity and modern state in his late years. Marx’s attempt of turning the archaic form of “commune” into a modern political practice can be seen in his passionate praise of Paris Commune and his political vision for the Russian village commune; it was imagined as the way of democratic and egalitarian self-governance of the people. Following Marx’s advice for developing agrarian commune, socialist states (most of them underdeveloped, rural countries) adopted the road of collectivization, though they neglected Marx’s intention of overcoming the modern state.

Like most socialist states, Chinese Marxists did not get rid of the obsession with the goal of modernizing itself and founding a modern nation-state; nevertheless, due to the influence of Mao Zedong, China’s socialism has taken on a distinct color of “anti-modernity” and “anti-statism.” On one hand, “agrarian co-operative” was used as a means for China’s “internal primitive accumulation,” and there was even attempts to turn “agricultural co-operative” into an organ of the state, as seen in the People’s Commune, where the administration of township government and the agricultural production were merged into one. However, on the other hand, the effective and functioning agricultural co-operatives tended to be those who coincided with the natural village, below the level of township government and beyond the direct control

of state officials. Therefore, agricultural co-operative at the level of village was free of the direct control of the state and became a semi-autonomous political-economic body. In this light, the Marxist sense of “commune” can be found at the agricultural co-operative. Chapter One shows that the traces of such a democratic and egalitarian commune that did not conform to the logic of state or capital are preserved in Zhao Shuli’s novel *Sanliwan Village*, which depicts agricultural co-operative from the perspective of peasants, and embeds the “co-operative” in the life-world local rural society rather than as part of the modern state; the thought of “delinking” the “commune” from the state became more manifest in his unfinished novel *Lingquan Cave*, written in 1958 when the agricultural co-operative was suffering from the state’s intense exploitation. Another writer Liu Qing, an ardent believer of “modernization” and a loyal follower of Communist Party, though appreciating co-operative mainly for its significance to China’s industrialization and modernization, nevertheless affirmed the legitimacy of the co-operative for its ethics of “mutual-aid” and “helping the weak.”

This internal complexity and heterogeneity of China’s socialism was preserved in and extended to the Reform period in 1980s. Chapter Two deals with the changed form of agricultural co-operative, the “household contract responsibility system,” in which land was still collectively owned but was divided and contracted to each household, while peasants were entitled to the usage of land as members of the village. Under the increasing commercialized conditions, “commune” has lost its substantial economic function of organizing production activities and distributing products, but has ended up a supplement of capitalism, generating a huge army of migrating labor

force for the city, which suited with the flexible economy of post-Fordist capitalism. Drawing on Marxist theory on small peasant economy, I analyze how the small peasant family plays a crucial role in keeping this migrating force from permanent settling down in the city and lowers the cost of labor power, and how such fractured family threatens its designated function of reproduction of labor power. The “death” of labor power hidden in the capitalist logic is captured and exposed in “underclass literature” that emerged around 2004, which aimed to challenge the modernization and developmentalism of Chinese society. As I show in Fang Fang’s *Tu Ziqiang’s Personal Sorrow*, Chen Yingsong’s *Mother* and *Wild Cat Lake*, the equilibrium of small peasant family which integrates small peasants and migrant workers in a single economic unit is extremely vulnerable and precarious, and any disruption of this equilibrium will cause the unsustainability of the reproduction of labor power.

Entering into 2000s, China witnessed the resurging effort of restoring the cooperative organization in the countryside, as the state promoted the “New Co-operative Movement” and put huge financial investment in “New Countryside Construction.” The background was the overaccumulation of capital at an advanced stage. How to deal with the non-capitalist rural area has become the center of struggles of various social forces. Is the countryside to be opened up as a new frontier for the surplus capital to make profit, or is it to be guarded as the last guarantee of peasants’ livelihood? It is at this critical moment that the Chinese state displays its rich complexity and its indebtedness to the socialist past. New Left intellectuals and left-leaning economists look back at the socialist tradition of agricultural co-operative and hope to rebuild the village community into a functional economic co-operative, and

have been urging the state to divert the surplus funds to the long-term projects of infrastructure construction and welfare benefits of the rural population. Liu Jiming's novel *Human World* can be seen as a statement of New Left intellectuals regarding the rural issues, whose imaginary solution is full of utopian color. On the other hand, Wang Anyi's novel *Anonymous*, while displaying the philosophy of a "common" life formed between singular individuals through their "chance encounters" different from Liu Jiming, also places "common life" in the geographical space of countryside, a "delinked world" from the urban order based on property rights.

Land relations in China's rural area have been through major changes since 1940s, such as land reform, collectivization, and 1980s' economic reform, but the rule that peasants have the rights to their land has never changed. China did not have a pure and fully functional "commune" in Marx's sense, but elements of "commune" as a self-governing economic body existed here and there throughout the socialist period in the agricultural co-operative based on natural village, and China has witnessed the revival of the effort of "re-organizing" and "re-collectivizing" in recent years.

At any rate, China's rural area has been the source of inspiration for the intellectual debates and literary imagination of "other worlds" and a center of intellectual debates to this day. As a critical component of China's modernity, China's rural area was not only the center of revolutionary struggles of Communist Party since modern times, but continues to define the nature of Chinese state to this day. At the moment, how to deal with the land in the countryside is still under debate, but the still remaining collective landownership that has thus far resisted capital's infiltration

suggests undefined nature of Chinese society and the open possibility for China's future direction.

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